8

不遇職の最強賢者!?

健速
Takehaya

六畳間の侵略者!? 8

1.ティア、風邪をひく!?

2.魔法少女キリハ、誕生!

3.先輩の様子がおかしい?

4.早苗はいつも元気です!

KI

AA..

NADE NADE

……ぶにゅう~

もう少し直接的な方が良いのではないか?

NIYA NIYA

MO JI

MO JI

じ、じつは……

あたしほどじゃないけどねっ

HA HA HA

愛憎うずまく!?
第8巻もてんこ盛り!

そして孝太郎は、運命の岐路に立つ……

健速 たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」（HJ文庫）で作家デビュー。
最近、実家から自転車を持ってきた。乗ったのが久しぶりだった為に、その速度感についていけず戸惑う毎日。

ポコ

兵庫県出身のイラストレーター。
好物は焼きそば。最近はやきそばUF〇わさびマヨネーズにはまり中。

カバーイラスト／ポコ　装丁／渡辺宏一

た03-02-09

健速

六畳間の侵略者!? 8

HJ文庫

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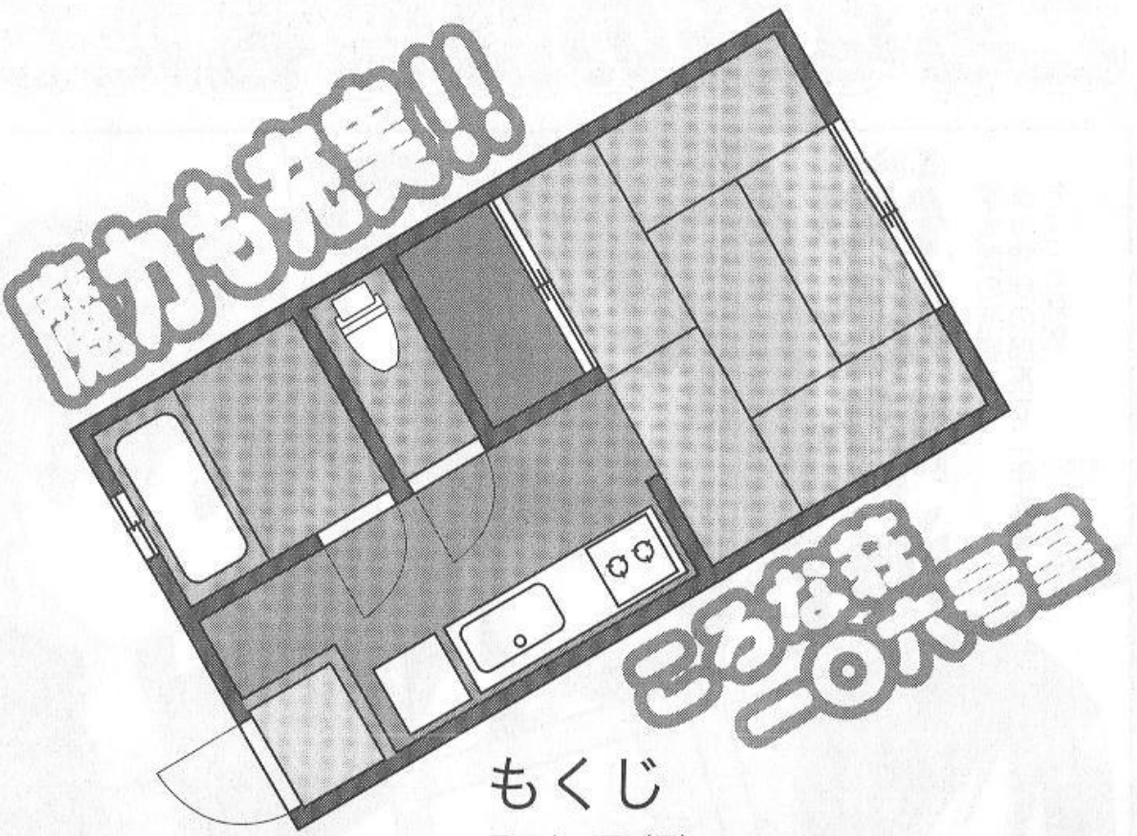
前回の戦いで敗れた悪の魔法少女・ダークネイビィが、新たな杖を手にふたたび暗躍を始めた。ターゲットはもちろん、ころな荘一〇六号室。最近急激に魔力が増大した原因を探り、憎き里見孝太郎を倒すべく、藍華真希は孝太郎に急接近を計る。
その頃、一〇六号室では孝太郎が、ゆりかに衝撃の事実を告げていた。
「喜べゆりか、魔法は実在するぞ」

HOBBY JAPAN



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The Witch’s Scheme

Sunday, January 31

Several months had passed since Maki had come to Kitsushouharukaze city.

During that time, she had been using a room in an apartment house. Though she had been using that room for months, it still didn't feel like someone was living there. There was little to no furniture, and nothing that a girl her age would normally have was anywhere to be seen. There was only a simple table and chair and a bed to sleep in. It was a dull room, almost like a prison cell.

“Come, Nightwalker!”

Maki's sharp voice echoed in that lonely room. A blue light was emitted from the front of her outstretched right hand. The next moment, an irregularity occurred in the same place.

The light was off, and the room was dark. However, the area in front of her right hand was even darker. A deep indigo mist spread out sideways. After a few seconds, the mist had spread to about a meter in length. It then solidified and turned into a cane.

This cane had been given the name 'Nightwalker.’ The cane had the function of amplifying one’s magical power, and it was a necessary tool for a magical girl like Maki. She grabbed the cane floating in the air and moved it overhead.

“Magic Communication Gem, Activate. Open Channel.”

Maki spoke out the words to activate the magical tools set up in the room. There were plenty of tools in the room, but the one she had activated let her communicate with her allies from far away.

Responding to Maki's voice, the gems buried into the wall began glowing. There were a total of six gems glowing: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue and Purple. With Maki in the center of the room, these gems began to surround her. The gems were emitting a dark light just like Maki's cane. The light gradually grew stronger, and eventually turned into the shape of a person. Girls wearing outfits of the same color as the gem appeared one after another. The gems had created 3D images via magic; it was a convenient magical tool that let the users talk face to face.

“Oh, Maki. Is that your new cane?”

Once the forms became stable, the girl in red called out to Maki. Maki lowered her cane and nodded at the girl in red.

“That's right. It took a while longer than I expected, but it's finally finished.”

In her fight with Yurika, Maki had lost her previous cane. This 'Nightwalker' was the replacement that she had made herself.

“Navy-chan, you could've made a cuter cane.”

The girl in orange referred to Maki as Navy-chan. Unlike Maki and the girl in red, she had a bright smile.

“A cane is for fighting. There's no need for decorations.”

Maki responded dissatisfied. She didn't like being called Navy-chan.

“Your cane is dull, the room is desolate and you have no makeup. Navy-chan, you're wasting your youth… that's right!”

The girl in orange pulled out a small something from her bosom.

The Witch's Scheme

"Navy-chan, use this! I accidentally bought an extra just yesterday, so I was thinking of giving it to someone!"

The girl in orange then threw it towards Maki. The thing passed through the gem and came flying towards her. This communication spell had the power to transfer small objects. Maki caught the flying object.

"Nail polish?"

"You're wrong, Navy-chan. It might look similar, but this is a liquid lipstick. You're a girl after all, so you should look more like it…"

The girl in orange sighed. She was amazed at how indifferent Maki was in this area.

"Anyway, you should use that to make yourself look a little cuter, Navy-chan. You have a great base, so if you just try to make yourself look cuter, the boys won't leave you alone."

"That's none of your business! I don't want anything to do with a man whose attitude changes from some makeup!"

Maki shouted out irritated and threw away the lipstick in her hand.

Why would I want to hide how I really look!

Maki hated lies and betrayal, so she intentionally kept makeup and fashion at a distance. Maki considered them to be convenient lies designed to make her look better than normal.

"My, my."

The girl in orange smiled wryly as she looked at the lipstick rolling on the floor.

"Navy-chan, you're so devoted…"

"Why does that matter? I didn't contact you to discuss this kind of thing!"

Maki irritably turned away from the girl in orange.

She didn't just hate being called Navy-chan by the girl in orange, but she also couldn't accept the girl in orange decorating herself through makeup and fashion.

"Calm down, Navy. You won't be able to properly deliver your report if you're in that state."

"I understand, Purple."

Admonished by the girl in purple, Maki closed her eyes and took deep breaths. When she opened her eyes again, she had returned to her normal self.

"I contacted you today because there were three things I wanted to discuss."

"One is that your cane is finished, correct?"

"Yes. As you can see, it's finally complete. I can now start taking action again."

Maki had her lost her cane in the fight with Yurika at the end of November. It took nearly two months to recreate the new cane. During that time, she had been too busy with her cane to do anything else. But with her cane finally completed, she could now return to her original mission.

"What's the second?"

"This would be the main subject."

Maki nodded with a serious expression.

"It seems the magic power in that room, Corona House's room 106, has greatly increased."

"It's… increased?"

The Witch’s Scheme

The girl in purple's expression got slightly sharper. Having been together for a long time, Maki understood how she felt from that slight change.

“Yes. I confirmed it with passive analysis magic when I completed the cane. There were some fluctuations so I couldn't get an accurate reading, but it's increased by 30% at the very least.”

The cane had been completed yesterday. Right after completion, she had used her cane to investigate the magic power in room 106 and noticed that the magic power gathering there had become even greater.

“Please wait for a more accurate analysis. It's hard to examine without Rainbow Yurika and Satomi Koutarou noticing.”

In order to examine the magic power, Maki had to use powerful magic right next to room 106. By doing that, there was obviously a high chance of Yurika or Koutarou finding out. Maki had to wait until Yurika or Koutarou showed an opening.

“Navy, do you know the reason for why the magic power's increased?”

“Something had happened.”

Maki continued speaking while carefully choosing her words. She wasn't completely sure of what had happened either.

“In the second half of January, they performed a play at their school. During that time, there seemed to have been a large-scale battle. I wasn't there, but I could sense that Rainbow Yurika was using magic.”

“A large-scale battle…”

Without her cane, Maki's ability to sense magic had weakened. But her being able to sense magic being used despite being far away meant that a large battle must have happened.

“A few days after that, I completed my cane and noticed that the magic power in room 106 had increased as I examined it again.”

“That battle does sound suspicious. Either their opponent created the reason for the magic power's increase, or they had no chance of winning without increasing the magic power…”

“I'm of the same opinion, Purple.”

Ever since she lost her cane, Maki was aware of two battles that Yurika had fought in: once at the theme park by the coast, and once during the play. It was highly likely that either of those events had been the cause for the change in room 106, but considering the timing, Maki suspected the play.

“That being said, we can't determine if it really was the reason for the change, with so many forces gathered in that room. More investigation is needed.”

“Two foreigners and a black haired woman; that's what you said before, right?”

“Yes. It's possible that any of them could be the reason too.”

Maki nodded at the girl in purple. The girls in red and orange, who had been listening, interjected.

“Maki, what about the martial arts expert?”

“Yeah. Wasn't there a ghost too?”

“I don't think there's much of a chance of them being the reason.”

However, Maki shook her head at the two.

The Witch’s Scheme

“It's hard to imagine a martial artist or a ghost to be the reason for the increase in magic power. Manafist and Lich aside, they're just a normal martial artist and ghost.”

Maki couldn't sense any magical power from the martial artist or ghost in room 106, so she couldn't imagine either of them being the reason for the increase in magical power.

“Navy, regardless of who's the cause, we need to investigate it as soon as possible.”

“That's the third thing I wanted to discuss. Since the cane is complete, and I've investigated what I wanted, I want you to let me do a more in-depth investigation.”

The time for an all-out attack from the seven evil magical girls, Darkness Rainbow, was close. The battle to occupy room 106 and control the magic power there was near.

Up to now, she had been investigating without attracting any attention. But after realizing that the magic power had increased, Maki wanted to do a more thorough investigation. The risk for Maki would increase, but with the battle so close, she wanted to eliminate any uncertain elements. They couldn't fail like they did with the fight with Rainbow Nana.

“I agree. If a mere fraction of that magic power is enough to fire off 10 Inferno Fires, and that magic power in question had increased by 30%, I'd want to avoid a direct confrontation.”

“Oh, that's rare coming from someone like you who loves a fight.”

Maki smiled. The girl in red found joy in fighting; despite that, she agreed on a more conservative investigation.

“I want to fight people. Ultimately, I enjoy the power comparison between people. Using amazing powers is attractive, but it's no fun if the enemy is the only one using it.”

The girl in red wanted a fight where both sides had the same magic power.

“I can't keep up with you.”

“That goes both ways.”

Despite saying that, both girls were smiling.

“I agree too. The numbers are about the same, and there's the magic power to take into consideration, so it doesn't look like we have a chance unless we look for an opening.”

The girl in orange agreed with Maki's suggestion as well. The remaining magical girls then agreed one after another.

“What about you, Purple?”

The only one who hadn't voiced her opinion yet was the girl in purple. The most mature looking of the girls wordlessly stared at Maki.

“…Navy, your true intentions isn't the investigation, is it?”

“Eh?”

Maki was surprised by the girl in purple's words. While Maki was stuttering for a reply, the girl in purple exposed Maki's true intentions.

“If you conduct a large-scaled investigation, you'll end up fighting that man, right?”

That man. The current owner of room 106, Satomi Koutarou.

He was a seemingly normal boy, but he was the mastermind who had been playing around with Maki. He was also a powerful magician who could use the power of room 106 to repel Maki.

To the girl in purple, it looked like Maki was more interested in fighting against Koutarou than scouting or investigating.

The Witch's Scheme

"Yes, that's right!"

Maki nodded and she easily revealed her true feelings.

Part of that was because Maki hated lies and deception, but also because the organization Darkness Rainbow was largely ruled by the nature of the magical girls. Using magic freely to realize their own dreams; that was their rule, their goal.

"If I could fight that man through my investigation, there could be nothing more joyful!"

"Maki, look who's talking."

The girl in red smiled. Maki had smiled because the girl in red only wanted to fight, but Maki herself had done the same thing.

"I can't agree. Your magic isn't suitable for direct combat."

"A direct clash isn't the only way to fight. Believe in me a little."

"Then I don't mind, but…"

Though she was still worried, the girl in purple gave up. It was true that they needed a thorough investigation. And knowing that Maki was planning on a direct confrontation, she decided to leave the rest to Maki's discretion. Freely using your magic to fulfill your desires was the Darkness Rainbow way.

"Maki, if you're going to fight, make sure you win."

"Navy-chan, you can do it."

"Thank you, everyone. I'll bring good news with my next report."

With those as her last words, Maki cut off the communication gems and the girls disappeared from the room.

"Fufufufu."

As silence returned to the room, Maki's quiet laughter could be heard.

"Finally… Finally the time has come…"

Maki didn't care if she had to use a trap, blackmail him or fight him directly. She just wanted to give Koutarou a taste of defeat. Just like when Koutarou had defeated her.

"You can't fool me anymore, Satomi Koutarou…"

Despite her calm looking appearance, Maki was all fired up. During these two months where she had focused on making her cane, her feelings for Koutarou had been fuming inside. And the time to release those feelings had finally come.

"This time it's my turn. I'll make you regret fooling this Darkness Navy."

Other than having lost in a fight, Maki was more humiliated at having been fooled. Lies and deceit were what she hated most of all. So she would thoroughly beat Koutarou down and subject him to the same humiliation she felt. Maki put her force into her empty left hand and made a fist, as if she was trying to crush Koutarou.

The High School Life of the Blue Knight

Part 1

Monday, February 1

During the third term of the first year in Kitsushouharukaze high school, there was a school trip. It was a major event that rivaled the third years' school excursion.

This year's destination was a ski resort. With winter sports popularity dying down, it was quite easy to book as a group. It was scheduled to take place for two days, between February 3 and February 5. Since today was February 1, the departure date was right around the corner.

"Theiamillis-san, can you ski?"

"No. This is a first for me and Ruth."

"In our country, skiing isn't very popular."

"What about you, Kurano-san?"

"I've done it as a child. That's right, maybe I should teach you, Theiamillis-san?"

"Skiing huh… Mackenzie-kun you look like you'd be good at it."

"I can ski."

"I knew it… it's a skill needed to attract girls after all."

"Kasagi-san, that's a baseless accusation!"

"But, Satomi-san said that the reason you're good at sports is so that you can attract girls."

"Kou!! What are you telling everyone behind my back!?"

With the departure two days from now, class 1A was in a festive mood. They were in the middle of holding a homeroom discussing the school trip, but most of the class wasn't listening to the teacher.

"Koutarou, Koutarou, Glasses-kun is calling for you."

Sanae whispered into Koutarou's ear while clinging onto his back.

"…"

However there was no answer from Koutarou. He had his elbow on his desk and silently gazed out the window.

"Hey Koutarou."

"Hm?"

After her third callout, Koutarou finally noticed Sanae calling out to him.

"What's up, Sanae?"

"Don't give me that, Glasses-kun is calling for you!"

"Oh."

Koutarou turned his head around towards Kenji. However, Kenji's gaze was no longer on Koutarou; he was instead gesturing to a nearby classmate. Seeing that, Koutarou turned his gaze back towards outside the window.

"What's wrong, Koutarou, spacing out like that."

"Just thinking."

Koutarou stared out the window without saying a word again. He was thinking about his conversation with Clan a few days ago.

Part 2

January 24.

Right after the play, Koutarou had called Clan out to the empty school roof.

There was something he wanted to talk to her about.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

With the setting evening sun, Clan's long hair shone. The bright orange contrasted with Koutarou's blue armor.

“There are two things I want to ask you.”

Koutarou started out seriously.

“Ask me?”

Clan had shown a faint smile, but seeing Koutarou's appearance, her expression turned more serious.

“Yeah. Of course I'm not asking you for free. I'll do anything I can for you in return.”

“You're being awfully reserved, Bertorion.”

“Really? We were enemies just an hour ago you know.”

“That's true.”

Koutarou and Clan smiled at each other. Just an hour ago in earth time, the two of them had been trying to defeat one another. But for some reason, they were now talking to each other in a friendly tone.

“Tell me. Based on the content I might hold off on killing you.”

Still smiling, some dangerous words left Clan's mouth, but Koutarou knew that she was joking.

“Okay. For my first request… I want you to keep everything that happened in the past a secret.”

“By the past, which do you mean? 2,000 years ago? 20 years ago? 10 years ago?”

“All of it.”

With a serious look on his face, Koutarou stared into Clan's eyes. This was a request he absolutely wanted Clan to listen to.

“Why's that?”

“The reason is… well, there’re two main reasons.”

After thinking for a while, Koutarou began explaining to Clan.

“The first reason is that I don't want to ruin Theia's dream. You know how much she loves the Blue Knight, right?”

“Yes, I am well aware.”

“The Blue Knight is her support. If she knew that we disturbed that legend… she would definitely be sad, and I want to avoid that.”

With the legend of the Blue Knight as her support, Theia tried to follow its example to remain a splendid noble. And she was trying to help her mother who was in a difficult position.

Despite that, Koutarou and Clan had disturbed that legend. So Koutarou wanted to keep that a secret from Theia. He wanted to keep the legend the way Theia knew it. If she knew of the truth, her support would crumble.

—I wonder about that…

Clan retorted in her mind.

She then directed her eyes towards Koutarou's waist. There she saw two swords hanging down. The royal families' greatest treasure, Signaltin. And the sword that Theia had given Koutarou, the treasured sword Saguratin.

—I think she would actually be rejoiced…

Clan gazed at Saguratin shining golden from the evening sun. Clan believed that just the fact that Saguratin was there revealed how Theia really felt. That said, keeping it a secret would lower the risk, so Clan wasn't against Koutarou's request.

Unaware of how Clan felt, Koutarou continued his explanation.

"And the other reason is the same as the Blue Knight's."

Koutarou removed Signaltin and its sheath from his waist.

"My existence and this sword will make Forthorthe's political situation unstable. The same reason as the legendary Blue Knight. Keeping it a secret would be better… It's also for your sake."

It was said that the Blue Knight had vanished because the existence of the hero who had saved the country destroyed the political balance of Forthorthe.

In that case, if Koutarou, who had gotten involved in the legend, and the very symbol of the Blue Knight's legend, Signaltin, were to appear in public, it could cause similar problems in the present. So Koutarou wanted to avoid that.

"My, are you worried about me?"

"…It's a strange sensation, really."

Koutarou smiled wryly. Clan felt the same, and the two smiled at each other again.

"The reasons are similar for the events 10 and 20 years ago. So I want to keep it all a secret."

"I understand the reasons. I want to keep them a secret too."

Clan listened to Koutarou's request, as she also wanted to keep events that could shake the royalty a secret as a princess of Forthorthe.

"Thanks, Clan."

"I don't want to put myself in danger either. So, what's your other request?"

"Ah, the second request is related to this."

As Koutarou said that, he knocked on the armor he was wearing.

"I want you to erase the records in this. If you don't, Theia and the others will find out."

"That's true. I'll erase it right away."

Clan stepped up to Koutarou and touched her bracelet to bring up the armor's systems. She was planning on erasing the contents of the database, but as she was about to confirm the erase command her hand stopped.

—Should I really just erase it… maybe I should make a backup, just in case…

Clan linked her bracelet with the systems on Koutarou's armor and she gradually erased the data while copying it over to her bracelet.

"…Hey, Bertorion."

It took a little bit of time to copy and erase. Having finished inputting commands into her bracelet, Clan called out to Koutarou.

“Could you stop it with the Bertorion? The secret will leak if you keep calling me that, even though we went through the trouble of erasing the data.”

“That's true. Can I call you Koutarou?”

“Yeah, I don't mind.”

Koutarou nodded, leaned his back towards the handrail on the rooftop and faced Clan.

“Koutarou, there's something I want you to ask you.”

“Sure. You listened to my request, so I'll answer anything.”

“Then I'll ask you…”

As Clan said that, she slightly tilted her head and smiled.

“Did you love her? Alaia-san…”

That was the gentlest smile Koutarou had ever seen from Clan. Seeing that smile, Koutarou felt like being surprisingly honest.

“I'm not sure… It's true that I wanted to help her more than anyone.”

Obeying his feelings, Koutarou honestly replied to Clan. He didn't feel like hiding anything from Clan.

“You could have just stayed then.”

“The one who loved her majesty Alaia wasn't me, but the Blue Knight.”

Koutarou smiled wryly while pushing his back towards the handrail.

Koutarou still believed that he had gotten in the way of the real Blue Knight. So even if Alaia fell in love with Koutarou, he believed that she hadn't fallen for him, but the real Blue Knight.

“…I'm not so sure about that…”

But Clan was different. Because she didn't have any real evidence, she hadn't told Koutarou, but Clan figured that Koutarou was the Blue Knight himself. There were plenty of things that didn't make sense if that wasn't the case, and she didn't believe that the legendary princess could be fooled by an act. So Clan believed that the feelings Alaia had for Koutarou were all real.

“Even if it's as you say… if she was truly in love with me… both I and her have things to do. So the result would have been the same.”

Leaning towards the handrail, Koutarou stared up towards the sky.

He remembered his time in Forthorthe 2,000 years ago and their farewell. They were memories he could never forget.

“To think you'd throw away your status and honor for a simple high school life…”

“There're still plenty of things I have to do.”

Clan had an amazed tone of voice, but she had a smile on her face.

“Besides, I have my oath.”

“…If you made an oath, you had no choice but to return, right?”

Clan leaned her back towards the handrail as well and looked up into the sky.

“That's what the Blue Knight is all about, right?”

“That's true… you're absolutely right…”

Clan finally showed an amazed expression for the first time.

—Despite practically being the embodiment of the Blue Knight, he's still not conscious of it… I can't believe this man…

Shortly after that Clan began to laugh.

“Fufufu, Ahahahaha!”

“What are you laughing for all of a sudden?”

“No, it's nothing. I just found it so funny. Kuku, Ahahahaha!”

“…Clan?”

“Ahahahaha! Ahh, it's so funny!”

Koutarou had made fun of Clan, calling her sly and vengeful, but he couldn't feel anything like that from Clan now as she showed a bright smile.

After Clan's laughter had died down, the copy and erasure of the data had finished. After confirming that with her bracelet, Clan nodded.

“It's all done.”

“Thank you, Clan.”

With that, Koutarou's business with Clan was concluded. With this, Koutarou could return to his normal life. His normal life, before he had travelled back in time with Clan.

—I'm finally back…

Koutarou finally felt like he had returned home.

“You're welcome.”

Clan lowered the right arm that her bracelet was on and looked at Koutarou.

“By the way, Koutarou. Rather than another request, I have a suggestion.”

Clan withdrew her smile and stared seriously at Koutarou.

“What is it?”

“Won't you serve me?”

“W-What!?”

Koutarou's eyes opened wide in surprise. Clan's words shocked Koutarou, just a while ago they had been enemies.

“Y-You… are you serious!?”

“I'm serious.”

Koutarou couldn't believe those words were true, but Clan had a serious expression. Without a change in expression she nodded.

“Don't be stupid!! If I do that, Theia won't be able to complete her trial!”

Koutarou had no intention of serving Clan. It wasn't because she had been his enemy; it was simply because Theia wouldn't be able to complete her trial. He simply couldn't accept that.

“Please calm down. I don't mind if you serve me after Theiamillis-san's trial is complete.”

“Eh!?”

Clan followed up with even more words that didn't make sense to Koutarou.

Clan had come to Earth just to get in the way of Theia's trial. That's why she had fought with Koutarou in the first place. Despite that, she had said something that sounded like she wanted Theia to complete her trial.

Koutarou couldn't understand the meaning behind that.

“If you serve by my side, I won't mind giving up my right to the throne. By doing that, Theiamillis-san will have a higher chance of becoming empress.”

“J-Just wait a minute, Clan!! Do you realize what you're saying!?”

Clan even mentioned relinquishing her claim to the throne. And so Koutarou's confusion reached its peak.

“You're the one who doesn't understand, Koutarou.”

With a small sigh, Clan gently touched the sword in Koutarou's hand.

“It's almost as if you don't understand the value of this sword.”

“This sword's value?”

Koutarou lifted the sword and sheath in front of himself. The holy sword, Signaltin. The sword given to him by Alaia.

“The greatest treasure of the royal families, a relic of history, the sword of sovereignty, Signaltin. Do you know how much it means for the royal families, for there to be someone who could freely use it?”

With those words, Koutarou understood what Clan wanted to say.

By making Koutarou her vassal, Clan was planning on returning Signaltin to the Forthorthe royal families.

“Of course, it holds meaning for me too.”

As she said that, Clan put her hand on her chest.

“…In other words, you want to put this sword in reach of the royal families. And Clan, you want to study me and this sword. Correct?”

“That's about right. For that, the rights to the throne is a cheap price.”

With her hand still on her chest, Clan smiled.

“Do you understand?”

“Yeah.”

Koutarou understood the meaning of what Clan said.

On top of obviously wanting to reclaim the sword, Clan, as a scientist, wanted to study it. Because of that, Clan requested that Koutarou became her vassal.

Koutarou understood that as well, it was a very logical request.

“From your position, I think it's only natural for you to want to keep this sword close.”

“Since you understand my circumstances, I hope you can give me a serious reply.”

—Of course, those are not the only reasons…

Those were not the only reasons that Clan wanted to make Koutarou her vassal. She actually had one more ulterior motive.

—There are countless royalties who have become emperor; however, there is only one who has made the Blue Knight her vassal. And he was only her vassal for a few months. If I can make Koutarou my vassal, I will be the true sole ruler of the Blue Knight! For that, I'd gladly give the throne to Theiamillis-san!

Clan desired Koutarou so she could earn the ultimate status of being the Blue Knight's master. The royal families' ultimate dream was to have the Blue Knight truly become their vassal, that was something not even the Silver Princess could do. The only one who had a chance right now was Clan who shared the secret with Koutarou.

"I'll hear your answer another time. Please think hard and long about it until then."

"…Yeah."

However, Clan hadn't noticed.

Employing the services of the Blue Knight, whose existence she couldn't make public, was only for self-satisfaction. Despite that, she felt like she didn't mind. Clan still hadn't noticed the meaning behind those feelings.

Part 3

“Are girls really everything to you, Mackenzie-kun?”

“Girls aren't the only reason for me to live.”

“But, Satomi-san said so.”

“He's just having fun as he looks at me being troubled!”

Time passed, Koutarou stopped looking out the window and the class was still in a festive mood. Because of that, the homeroom had barely made any progress.

—That Clan… she gave me some troublesome homework…

Looking at the bracelet on his right arm, Koutarou let out a small sigh. He had been given that bracelet by Clan.

Koutarou had left Signaltin to Clan. Since that sword was the most valued artifact in all of Forthorthe's history, he couldn't just leave it lying around. However, leaving it to Theia would be problematic. So Koutarou decided to leave it to Clan, since she was aware of the circumstances.

In return, he got this bracelet. Normally, Clan would be studying the sword, but in times of emergency, he could use the bracelet to call for the sword. It was a minor consideration not common to Clan.

—It's more calculated and easier to respond to than Ruth-san's though…

This wasn't the first time Koutarou had been asked to become a vassal.

Theia had demanded it from the start, and lately Ruth wanted him to serve Theia, regardless of the trial. There were quite large differences between their reasons, but this was the third time Koutarou had been asked to become a vassal.

—I don't have a problem with sticking with Theia until she completes her trial. The problem is after that. Do I remain on Earth, or do I serve Theia or Clan?

As Koutarou was about to enter into deep thought again-

“Koutarou.”

Sanae's face appeared in front of him.

“Woah!?”

Surprised, Koutarou slightly flinched back and stopped his train of thought.

“W-What?”

“You've been strange lately. You have this deep wrinkle on your forehead whenever you're not doing anything.”

Sanae created a wrinkle with her hands as she said that.

“What's wrong? Are you turning into a hardboiled high schooler?”

“No, that's not it.”

That was when Koutarou noticed that he was making Sanae worry.

—Sanae's particularly sensitive to this kind of thing…

Sanae was always by Koutarou's side, and she could somewhat read his emotions through his spiritual energy. So Koutarou being in deep thought was making her worry. That wasn't something that he wanted.

—I don't have to decide right away, so I'll just focus on having fun skiing with everyone…

There was no conclusion in sight and no reason to make a decision. He couldn't let Theia complete her trial until Kiriha's problem was solved. And since he just got back to Earth, it couldn't be too bad for him to enjoy his normal life.

Having decided that, Koutarou changed gears and smiled at Sanae.

“It's just that I was thinking that going skiing would cost a lot of money.”

“What… is that all? I feel like I wasted my time worrying.”

Sanae quickly returned to a smile as well and clung onto Koutarou's back as always.

“You could just borrow money from Kiriha.”

“If I borrow from Kiriha-san, I'm scared of what comes later.”

“You'll be fine. Kiriha loves Koutarou too.”

“Really?”

“Not as much as me though.”

“Hey, Sanae, I can't see anything.”

“I'm looking, so you'll be fine!”

The normal mood between Koutarou and Sanae returned. It was a small matter, but to Koutarou it was one of the things he wanted to enjoy.

“Kou, because of you I've been going through hell!”

“You've been going through hell because of your own behavior, Mackenzie.”

“Satomi-kun, tell me the truth!”

“Landlord-san, Mackenzie is just awful.”

“Don't just come up with random crap!! It's all your doing!!”

Just like that, Koutarou jumped back into his normal life.

Part 4

With the start of February, the winter season was finally kicking into full gear. The club building positioned in the shadow of the school building was particularly cold and troubled all the clubs. And since the knitting society's club room was in the corner of the building, once Koutarou and Harumi entered the room after school, they could see their own breaths.

“Brrr, it's freezing.”

Entering the club room, Koutarou approached the heater. It was a heater that had been used in this club room for generations. That was their last fort of resistance against this temperature.

After pressing the ignition button a couple of times, a fire lit up. But even with the heater on, the room wasn't quite heating up. A few more minutes were required before Koutarou could feel warm.

“…It's finally getting warmer.”

Confirming that the heater was working, Koutarou sat down on his normal chair. Koutarou and Harumi would always sit down by the heater to knit. Since it was just the two of them in the society, it was easier to knit by the heater rather than waiting for the entire room to heat up.

At that moment, the second member of the society opened the door and entered the room.

“I'm sorry I'm a bit late, Satomi-kun.”

That would be Sakuraba Harumi, a girl with pure-white skin and long black hair.

“No worries, the heater's just started to heat the room up.”

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

Harumi smiled and thanked Koutarou, before sitting down on a chair next to him. Trying to sit in front of the heater like this, they would naturally end up shoulder to shoulder. It was a situation that made her somewhat happy.

“By the way, Sakuraba-senpai, did something happen today?”

While preparing his knitting tools, Koutarou called out to Harumi. He wasn't angry that she had shown up later than usual, instead he was interested in why she had been late since she normally kept the time.

“Uh.”

Harumi's expression suddenly froze and her face gradually turned red. It was obvious to Koutarou that the reason for that wasn't the heater.

“Hahaha, from the looks of it, it seems like it's something interesting.”

“Geez, Satomi-kun!”

Harumi puffed up her cheeks. That was an expression she'd only show Koutarou. As Harumi always had a calm atmosphere to her, Koutarou felt that her making an expression like that made her look cuter than usual.

“It's rude of you to laugh when the other party is serious.”

“Then what happened?”

“Uhh…”

Air slowly left Harumi's cheeks. At the same time her shoulders dropped, she turned down her face.

“A-Actually…”

Harumi shoved her hand into her bag and pulled out an envelope.

Sakuraba Harumi-sama was neatly written on it.

“Actually, I was given a love letter…”

Harumi presented the envelope to Koutarou and turned her face away as if to escape from Koutarou's glance.

“A love letter, huh. That's quite antique nowadays.”

The envelope was of high quality Japanese paper. The writer had used a pen; though the characters weren't well written, one could tell that the writer had been very thorough and thoughtful. From that, it seemed pretty clear that it was a serious love letter.

—I see, so that's why senpai said it was rude of me to laugh.

Koutarou took the envelope from Harumi and carefully took out the letter within. If it was as Harumi had said, that it was a serious love letter, he should treat it with care.

“Let's see here…”

Koutarou unfolded the letter and passed his eyes through its content. The earnest and politely written characters expressed the straight and honest feelings of the writer.

“I see.”

After reading part ways through, Koutarou folded the letter back up. This letter was directed at Harumi. So Koutarou hesitated doing anything else after confirming its contents.

“Certainly, I can't really laugh at these serious feelings.”

Koutarou returned the letter to the envelope and gave it back to Harumi.

“Yes… That's why I was somewhat troubled.”

After receiving the envelope, Harumi blushed and looked up at Koutarou. She was overwhelmed by embarrassment, but she was interested in Koutarou's reaction.

“Troubled? Why?”

“Having received such a serious letter, I realized I can't think of any way to decline without hurting the writer's feelings…”

Harumi stared at Koutarou as if asking for help. She wanted him to tell her what she should do. And if possible, she wanted him to be a little jealous. All kinds of feelings were mixed in to Harumi's glance.

“So you're really declining?”

Koutarou put his hand on top of his mouth and showed a small smile.

This wasn't actually the first time this had happened. After getting up on the stage, Harumi would often receive confessions from boys.

“That's because… I don't really know the person… and it was so sudden.”

However, Harumi would always decline the confessions. Even though she had gotten more courageous after having the opportunity to get up on stage, she was still bad at dealing with people, so sudden confessions scared her.

“But, this time I've gotten such a polite letter… and I've understood that person's feelings, so I'm not sure if I can decline without giving a reason like always…”

Being an avid reader, Harumi had an easier time understanding a person's feelings through a letter, rather than being told to her face. Because of that, she wasn't sure how she would decline this confessor.

“In that case… it might be a bit plain, but what if you say you already have someone you like?”

That was the first thing that popped into Koutarou's head. He believed that anything but this odd lie would hurt the writer.

“Even you must have one or two you've liked, right? So this wouldn't be a complete lie, and the other party wouldn't be hurt.”

“T-That's true, but…”

Koutarou thought it was a brilliant idea, but hearing that, Harumi's face turned redder than before. That's because the person Harumi liked was Koutarou.

“But, what if… what if they ask who that person is?”

“Then you could just tell them.”

Just tell them. That was Koutarou's simple idea that would put an end to this.

“I-I can't!”

Harumi shook her hands and head.

“If that caused that person trouble I would feel bad!”

“It's okay. This is the person that Sakuraba-senpai has fallen for. That person wouldn't get angry over something like that.”

Koutarou smiled.

To him. it only looked like Harumi was overthinking things.

“I-Is that really so?”

“It would be one thing if that person didn't know you, but any person that knew you wouldn't get mad.”

A person that knew her would probably be okay with it. If anything, if that person got mad because of that, they probably wouldn't get along as lovers. So either way, there was no need for Harumi to worry. That was how Koutarou thought of it.

“Besides, this is a chance.”

Koutarou stressed this as being more important.

“Chance?”

Harumi's eyes opened wide in surprise.

“It's your chance to tell the person you like how you feel.”

“T-That's still, still too fast! Far too fast!!”

As Koutarou explained what he meant by chance, Harumi shook her head even faster than before.

“I think it's a good chance though.”

Koutarou desperately suppressed his urge to laugh, as Harumi's overly shaken appearance looked adorable to him.

“If it doesn't work I'll be troubled! I don't want to face that reality right now! And I'm still not mentally prepared!”

“Ku, Kukuku, T-That is troubling, Ku, Kukuku.”

Eventually laughter leaked from Koutarou's mouth. Seeing Harumi panic like a little chicken, Koutarou couldn't hold his laughter in.

“Geez, Satomi-kun! Please don't laugh, I'm serious!”

Harumi clenched her hands and hit Koutarou with her soft and harmless fists.

“S-Sorry, b-but it was, just so funny, Ku, Kukuku *cough*”

“You didn't have to laugh so hard that you’d choke! Geez~!”

“*cough* *cough*”

Koutarou coughed repeatedly and finally managed to hold his laughter in. But if he let his guard down even a little he felt like he would burst out laughing again, so he looked away from Harumi who was glaring at him.

“…E-Excuse me.”

“Geez… stupid Satomi-kun.”

Harumi let out some disgruntled words to the back of Koutarou's head.

—If Satomi-kun knew he was the one I like, what kind of face would he make?

With her cheeks puffed, Harumi's mind was being filled with those feelings. And those feelings led her to doubt.

—Doesn't Satomi-kun want to know who I like…?

Despite being this close to Harumi's problem, Koutarou didn't show any signs of being interested in her love interest. She began worrying if Koutarou even sees her as a woman.

—Maybe… I should try asking…?

There, Harumi decided to ask Koutarou. After taking a deep breath, and straightening out her feelings, she called out to Koutarou in a low voice.

“Uhm, Satomi-kun…”

“Yes?”

Koutarou turned his eyes back towards Harumi. At this time he was no longer laughing. With the short passage of time, Harumi's voice and expression had turned serious.

“Just a hypothetical question… if Satomi-kun fell in love with a girl… and that girl didn't love Satomi-kun, but a different boy, what would you do?”

Harumi didn't have the courage to directly ask Koutarou if he was interested in her. Because of that, she changed the way she asked her question. Even though it seemed like Koutarou had no interest in Harumi, she wanted to confirm if he liked her or not.

—That's the situation you're in, right, Sakuraba-senpai…

Someone liked Harumi and gave her a love letter. But Harumi liked another boy. So how would the person who gave her the love letter feel? Koutarou interpreted Harumi's question like so.

“Hmm, if it was me…”

Koutarou began imagining himself in that situation. As he did, Harumi's and Alaia's appearances overlapped.

—Your majesty…

At that moment, Koutarou realized what he would do in that situation.

“If it was me, I would probably cheer for her. I would cheer for her, so that her love would come through.”

“Really? Would you be fine with that?”

Harumi's eyes opened wide in surprise once more. That was an unexpected answer to her. She imagined that he would answer that he would give up or steal her.

“This is the person you're really in love with.”

“Yes. So I'd really want her to get together with the person she truly loved.”

Koutarou answered without hesitation.

The reason he felt that way was because he knew Alaia. Despite loving the Blue Knight, she devoted herself to the well-being of her citizens. He felt that way after seeing her up close, and after having gotten in the way of her meeting with the real Blue Knight.

He wanted the person he loved to get together with the person she loved.

“Of course, if that girl’s love goes unrequited, I'll take my chance and confess.”

He being the person she loved would be ideal, but that kind of coincidence would rarely happen. So he would confess after the love of the person he loved had ended. That was how he felt.

“I see…”

Hearing Koutarou's answer, Harumi felt a sense of relief.

—Good… I have a chance too… but based on what he just said, while I ask him for advice like this, he will just cheer for me…

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

“I don't know if my answer will be of any help though.”

Koutarou realized that his answer was a special case. There shouldn't be that many cases of meeting a real princess, seeing how she lived her life and getting in the way of her love.

“No, it's very helpful.”

However, that was enough for Harumi. She wanted to know how Koutarou felt.

—I should properly decline the writer of this letter. And I'll make sure to resolve anything like this on my own from now on. I'll show Satomi-kun that he's the only one for me. I'll confess after he's understood that…

Having found her path from now on, Harumi began smiling like always. And she then began moving her knitting needles.

“By the way, the school trip is right around the corner, isn't it?”

“Yes. It's been a long time since I last went skiing.”

Koutarou followed suit and the two of them moved their knitting needles side by side.

“Are you good at skiing? You look like you would be.”

“I don't have a lot of experience skiing, so I'm just average. How about you, Sakuraba-senpai? Can you ski?”

“Fufu, actually, I have confidence in my skiing.”

They continued with their normal club activities. The two of them spent their time leisurely and cheerfully talking to one another.

“That's surprising.”

“I hate that mean part of you. As a punishment, you'll have to bring me a souvenir.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

With the winter in full swing, the temperature had dropped and the club room was cold. However, it was being warmed by a cheerful, warm atmosphere on top of the power of the antique heater.

The Birth of a Magical Girl?!

Part 1

Monday, February 1

“I'm back~… Oh, there's no one here.”

When Koutarou returned to room 106, he found it empty. Because of their various circumstances, none of the others had come back yet. Koutarou's greeting was left without response.

Koutarou took off his shoes by the entrance, passed by the kitchen and entered the inner room. With the lights off, the room was dark and quiet.

“That's pretty unusual.”

Koutarou put his backpack in a corner of the room and turned on the lights. Despite the light, the room was still silent.

“That's right, this is a good chance.”

However, there were things he could do with no one around. Having remembered that, Koutarou brought the bracelet that Clan had given him closer to his mouth.

“Cradle, can you bring out my belongings?”

“As you wish, my lord.”

After giving orders to the bracelet, a black hole appeared in front of Koutarou. It was the same kind that Theia and Clan would use when they summoned weapons. However, what came out of this hole wasn't a weapon, but a plastic container which was several dozen centimeters long.

“Alright, let's do some organizing.”

Inside the container were Koutarou's belongings. They were items that he had gotten during his travels with Clan, and they were things that he couldn't show the invaders. That's why now was the only time he'd get to organize them.

“I need this… I don't need this…”

Inside the container were clothing and the likes that he had used on site, but there were also knives and whetstones mixed in. Though he had called them belongings, there were all kinds of items in there.

Koutarou flipped the container upside down and took out all of the goods, only returning what he didn't need back into the container. He left the things he needed on the tatami mat.

After he was done, Koutarou was planning on putting away the container back on Clan's spaceship. He had considered throwing the things he didn't need away, but because of the method used to obtain them, they were things he could never get again. And since he was attached to a lot of it, he couldn't bear to just dispose of them.

“Hm? This is…”

After working for a while, Koutarou's hand unexpectedly stopped. He had found something interesting among his belongings.

“I guess… I'll keep this close by.”

It was a necklace with an odd design. It consisted of gems and beautifully polished teeth of beasts, strung up by threads of several colors. Since it was something he'd rarely seen, Koutarou had taken a liking to it.

The Birth of a Magical Girl?!

“If I lose this, I'll never hear the end of it.”

Deciding to keep the necklace, Koutarou put it back on the tatami mat. He remembered the face of the person who gave him the necklace.

Now that I think about it…

There, Koutarou stopped moving once more. There was something he had remembered about the person that had given him the necklace.

“…No, that can't be right. It's not possible.”

However, Koutarou shook his head and began organizing his belongings once more.

Since the container wasn't all that large, Koutarou was done after a short while.

“Cradle, return the container to its original position.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

After Koutarou's orders, the plastic container passed through a black hole and was returned to Clan's spaceship, leaving several goods behind in the room.

It wasn't just the necklace; Koutarou had a lot of memories with the goods that remained. This included items like Charl's handmade insignia. It had absolutely no use, but it was something he wanted to keep close. In fact, there were very few things he had kept for use.

“Alright, I guess this is good enough.”

After putting the goods into a paper bag, Koutarou put them away in the wardrobe, the same place where his half-knit sweater was.

“I'm back~~!”

“I’m back too~”

At that moment, the energetic voices of Sanae and Yurika could be heard from the front door.

“To the TV, Love Love Heart is about to start!”

“W-Wait up, Sanae-chan! If you pull me too hard—”

The sound of something heavy hitting the floor could be heard. The next moment, Sanae appeared in the inner room.

“Ah, you're back, Koutarou!”

“Welcome home, Sanae.”

“I'm back! Look, Koutarou, we bought this!”

After finding Koutarou, Sanae showed him a large smile. She moved her fingers and made a small box float in front of Koutarou. It was some anime merchandise that she and Yurika had bought.

“Good for you, Sanae.”

“Yes!”

Quick on the nod, Sanae hurried off towards the TV, with the box floating after her. It was almost time for the anime where the merchandise had come from to be broadcast.

“Ah, ow ow.”

“Welcome home, Yurika.”

The Birth of a Magical Girl?!

Yurika staggered past Koutarou. For some reason, she was holding her head in her hands with tears in her eyes.

“I-I'm ba~ck.”

“What's wrong, Yurika?”

“No, i-it's nothing.”

“Yurika, it's starting! It's starting!”

“Oka~y.”

While tears began forming in the corners of her eyes, Yurika sat down next to Sanae.

The next moment, a familiar song began playing on the TV. It was the opening theme of the anime that Sanae or Yurika made sure to never miss.

Part 2

“Next time on Magical Girl Love Love Heart! 'An enemy!? An ally!? Sparkling Heart appears!' A bouquet of flowers will be delivered to your maiden heart!!”

After the flashy preview, the anime ended and Sanae and Yurika who had been sitting still in front of the TV all this time began moving.

“Yurika, I wonder who Sparkling Heart is!”

“It must be the character we've seen peeks and glances of!”

“That might be true!”

“Do you think she's an enemy!? Or an ally!?”

“I wonder!?”

Sanae and Yurika were excitedly talking about the anime that had just ended.

Based on the name, Sparkling Heart is probably Love Love Heart's ally. Well, pretending not to notice is part of the fun of this kind of anime.

Koutarou watched over the two girls.

“Maybe some new magic will appear too!?”

“It probably will! It sure feels like it will!”

The two of them were cheerfully chatting while repeating the magical gestures used in the anime. It seems this week’s episode had left them very satisfied.

Magic? Right, I had that!

Watching over the two, Koutarou remembered the existence of a certain something. Koutarou approached the wardrobe and pulled out a long stick wrapped in cloth. It was one of the things he had gotten a hold of during his time with Clan, It was too long to store in the container, so he had to keep it separate.

“Yurika, could you come over?”

With the stick in his hand, he called for Yurika.

“Y-Yes!?”

Having been called out during the middle of her conversation she was slightly surprised. But she soon crawled up to the tea table at the center of the room.

“What is it?”

“Actually, I wanted to apologize to you.”

Koutarou put the long stick still wrapped in cloth on the table and sat down, straight and formally. He couldn't really sit cross-legged when he was about to apologize.

“About the hot water you used to wake me up this morning?”

“No.”

“Then is it about kicking the ball in my face during gym class today?”

“It's not that either.”

“I know!! It's about Yurika's taiyaki that you ate, isn't it!?”

“That was you, Satomi-san!?”

“No, no. Sanae, don't make things more complicated.”

“Even if you say that, you did eat it.”

“I ate it, but that's not what I wanted to talk about.”

“Fueeeeee~! You're terrible, you're unfair! I was looking forward to eating it!”

“I got, I got it! I'll buy one for you later, just calm down!”

“Really!?”

Yurika had been crying for real, but when she realized that Koutarou would buy a new one for her, she stopped.

Yurika, can't you have some more pride…

While feeling sorry, Koutarou couldn't help but worry about Yurika's future.

“Bean jam… Cream… Chocolate… Cheese…”

“So, Koutarou, what are you apologizing for?”

In place of Yurika who was busy dreaming, Sanae asked Koutarou.

“About that, actually—”

“Satomi-san, how many taiyakis will you buy me!?”

“Listen to what I have to say!”

“…Oka~y, sorry.”

Waiting for Yurika to shift her focus to him, Koutarou finally began speaking slowly.

“Yurika, I'm not sure what to say after calling you an idiot and whatnot every time you brought this up, but…”

“Yes…”

“Be happy, Yurika, magic exists.”

“Yes?”

Hearing Koutarou's words, Yurika's pupils turned to tiny dots.

“I know you won't believe me right away, but I have seen it with my own eyes.”

“You're kidding!? R-Really, Koutarou!?”

In contrast to Koutarou who was talking calmly, Sanae jumped with excitement and asked him to explain in further detail.

“Yeah. I can't go into details, but there's no mistaking it.”

“Oooo~h! Is that so!?”

Sanae's eyes were sparkling. She didn't believe in magic, but since she loved the magical girl anime, she believed she would be happy if it existed. And since the one claiming it was real was Koutarou and not Yurika, she believed him right away.

“W-Why now, all of a sudden?”

However, Yurika herself couldn't hide her confusion and she stared at Koutarou.

“Like I said the other day, I can't go into details. I would cause trouble for a lot of people if I did.”

Koutarou hadn't told the invaders what had happened during the time when he and Clan had vanished. All he had told them was that some trouble had happened and he and Clan had to work together, and during that time they had come to an understanding. He hadn't told them that

a large amount of time had passed during the few minutes they were gone or of any of the events that had happened during that time.

“Instead, I got something cool for you.”

“Something cool?”

“I wish I got a souvenir too.”

As Sanae glanced at Koutarou, he stripped the cloth from the long stick, revealing a cane. Unlike Yurika's cane, it was made from wood that had a plain design using black and brown colors.

“T-This is!?”

The moment she saw that, Yurika was speechless. Powerful magic had been cast on the cane. She hadn't noticed it up until now because it had been camouflaged by room 106's magic power, but now that it was right in front of her, it was obvious to a magician like herself.

“That's right, it's a magical cane. By using this, even someone who has no talent for magic can freely use spells. Of course the power would be weaker.”

“Koutarou, you mean it's a real magical stick!?”

Sanae shook the anime merchandise she had gotten just today. Inside the box was a magical stick that had appeared in the anime.

“Yeah. Just look.”

Koutarou smiled at Sanae and grabbed the cane. He stared at the tip and concentrated.

“Fire! Appear!”

Immediately after Koutarou's word, a small fire appeared at tip of the cane. It was almost like a candle in the shape of a cane.

“Wow, fire really came out! Amazing!!”

“This isn't just a magical cane!?”

Sanae had simply been surprised by the fire appearing as Koutarou commanded, but Yurika was surprised over something else.

This cane isn't of Folsarian design!! And what's more, it read Satomi-san's mind and cast a suitable spell!!

Koutarou was using a different kind of magic from what Yurika used. The magic she was using was the kind of magic she had learned from her predecessor, Rainbow Nana. It was the general kind of magic used in the magical country of Folsaria. She could indeed feel magic at work when Koutarou had summoned flame, but it worked in a different way from Folsarian magic.

“S-Satomi-san, where did you get this!?”

Koutarou had met a magician somewhere. What's more, it was a magician not from Folsaria. It was neither Rainbow Heart or Darkness Rainbow, but a completely different magician. It was an existence Yurika was really interested in.

“Sorry, but I can't say. Like I said, if I carelessly tell you, I could trouble a ton of people. I don't want to bother the people who have helped me or those related. Please understand, Yurika.”

However, Koutarou stubbornly refused to tell her. His tone was calm, but it was a firm rejection.

“O-Okay…”

Yurika reluctantly withdrew. Sensing Koutarou's strong will, she realized that questioning him any further would be useless.

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It doesn't seem like there's any danger, so I guess it's fine for now…

Yurika imagined that while he had been gone, Koutarou had met a magician who had helped him. And from Koutarou's words of not wanting to cause them any trouble, that person probably wasn't an evil magician. Yurika had no reason to get in the way since it didn't seem to be a magician who used magic for evil or from Folsaria. And since the owner of that cane was Koutarou, there was no need to worry.

“Here, Yurika.”

Koutarou presented the cane to Yurika who was being silent.

“Satomi-san?”

After taking a look at the cane, Yurika gave Koutarou a suspicious glance.

“I said I got it for you, didn't I?”

“You're giving this, to me?”

“That's right. Here, take it, Yurika.”

Koutarou nodded and shoved the cane into Yurika's hands. Not understanding what Koutarou wanted, she repeatedly looked at him and the cane in her hands.

Koutarou believed in magic. Despite that, she didn't understand the meaning of being given a cane when she could already use powerful magic.

I wonder if it can use some kind of special magic?

Yurika looked at the cane and tilted her head.

“Good for you, Yurika!!”

Sanae had noticed Koutarou's intentions first. While showing the anime merchandise box to Yurika, she continued talking loudly. On the box were a bunch of images of magical girls using the magical stick.

“With this, you'll graduate from being a cosplayer! Now you're a real magical girl!”

“Ah.”

That was when Yurika finally understood Koutarou's intentions.

Koutarou had said that he got this for her. He had gotten a magical cane that let anyone use magic as a souvenir to give to a cosplayer who couldn't use magic. He was definitely not giving a brand new magical cane as a present to the magical girl of love and courage ☆ Rainbow Yurika.

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“Wow! I'm so envious, Yurika~! Now you're a real magical girl!”

“I've been a real one for a long time!!”

Sanae's eyes were filled with envy. However Yurika herself had begun crying.

S-Satomi-san believes in magic now, but he doesn't believe that I'm a magical girl!!

Having understood why she had been given the cane, Yurika couldn't help but cry. She was well aware that it was better if her secret didn't leak out, but at this point, she wanted Koutarou to know. However, reality was harsh: even though Koutarou now believed in magic, Yurika was still a cosplayer to him.

“Good for you, Yurika… A cosplayer that can use real magic, huh… there aren't that many lucky cosplayers around.”

“You're wrong, that's not it at all!”

“Sanae, you don't have to keep calling her a cosplayer. Her wish has finally been fulfilled.”

“Ah, right. Sorry, Yurika. That was a little insensitive of me.”

“Yurika has been a magical girl for a long time now. Let's just leave it at that, okay?”

“Koutarou, you're quite the man aren't you?”

“So you finally realized?”

“Fufu, I knew that from before♪”

“…I want to punch him. I want to beat up Satomi-san…”

Yurika wept bitterly while firmly grasping the cane.

Her position as the magical girl of room 106 had finally been established. However, the humiliation she had felt today far exceeded what she had ever felt before.

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Part 3

Koutarou had brought the cane home so that Yurika had the means to defend herself.

In his mind, she was just a cosplay loving classmate. That's what Yurika herself had let him think. So to him, Yurika was a civilian mixed in with the invaders.

On top of that, Yurika was kind hearted and gentle, and disliked fighting. Though they were both civilians, unlike Koutarou who was athletic and good at fighting, Yurika had no means to protect herself from the troubles that occurred around room 106.

What if Yurika was to get involved in trouble caused by the underground people or Forthorthe?

Up until now, she had been lucky(?) and managed to avoid that, but that might not be true in the future. Koutarou had always been worried about that, so he had gotten her a magical cane so she could protect herself. If anything it was a tool for self-defense.

“So to sum it up, that thing can use a lot of magic, but it doesn’t have all that much power. So don't be overconfident and just focus on protecting yourself. Okay?”

The cane Koutarou had given to Yurika had been created to allow the user to freely use all kinds of magic, so it had the power to deal with any kind of situation. It was perfect for a civilian to use as self-defense. However, because it could use all kinds of magic, it lacked power. It couldn't be relied on when used for attacking.

“I understand.”

Yurika obediently nodded at Koutarou's words. She was planning on making use of this situation.

As long as I have this cane, I can use magic in front of everyone…

Her perception of the situation had changed, and she was planning on using her own magic while holding this cane. By doing that, it would look to the residents of room 106 like she was using the magic of the cane, but in reality she would be using her own. Since she could use magic while not being suspected as being anything but a cosplayer, there was no camouflage more convenient than this.

“Hey magical girl. Don't look away and press it harder.”

“O-Okaaay!”

Yurika was using the cane in her hand to press down on Theia's shoulders.

The cane was vibrating and massaging her shoulders.

“Ooh… so this is magic, huh… it feels pretty good. Ruth, have her do it to you too later.”

“Would that be alright, Yurika-sama?”

“Ah, yes, of course~”

Yurika nodded with a smile. However, in contrast to her smile she was not very satisfied.

Something's wrong… This is wrong somehow… It's great that I can use magic without revealing myself… but something is wrong!

Yurika was in the middle of using her cane to massage Theia's shoulder via vibration magic.

Wait, this isn't a magical girl’s job!

Just before, she had used heating magic to iron clothes. Before that she had used supersonic magic to drive away cats from Corona House.

This situation was different from what she had dreamed off. She believed that if everyone knew she could use magic, they would start to respect her.

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And I feel like it's getting worse and worse…

Yurika began feeling like she was better off being just a cosplayer.

It was indeed convenient that she could use the cane to hide her identity. From now on she could use magic bravely in front of everyone. However, Folsarian rules said that magic must not be misused, be it for evil or for private reasons. Of course, massaging or ironing were clear cases of misusage of magic. Although she wasn't using Folsarian magic, it was a bit of a grey area, hence Yurika was still a bit anxious.

“Hey Yurika, can I have your old cane?”

“N-No way!! You can't have that!!”

Sanae had pulled out Yurika's cane, Angel Halo, from the wardrobe. With it in her hand, she took various anime poses. Seeing that, blood drained from Yurika's face and she snatched the cane back from Sanae. Normally she was scared of ghosts and would never go against Sanae, but she couldn't give up on that cane.

“But you have a real magical cane that you got from Koutarou.”

“They're both real!”

“I want to be more like a magical girl too! You cheapskate!”

“This is a precious cane that I got from the person who saved my life! I definitely can't give this away!!”

Yurika threw her new cane away and embraced her old one as if trying to hide it from Sanae with her eyes full of tears.

“Geez.”

Seeing that, Sanae puffed up her cheeks and easily gave up on the cane. Instead she floated towards Koutarou.

“Koutarou, give me something too.”

“If it's a charm against evil spirits that you want, you can get one.”

“I don't want a charm that explodes whenever I touch it! I want something good!”

Seeing Sanae parting from her, Yurika let out a sigh of relief.

No matter what happens, I can't give up this cane…

Yurika's cane, Angel Halo, was the cane used by Nana, her best friend, teacher and savior. To Yurika, it was far more than just a tool, and she would never part ways with it.

“What would something good be?”

“Something that looks appropriate for a magical girl! And if that’s not possible, something love-like!”

“What would something love-like be?”

“Something like what boys give girls on White Day!” [1]

“White Day, huh… I've never gotten any chocolate on Valentine's Day so I'm not that knowledgeable in that area.”

[1] The reverse of Valentine's day in Japan, where boys return gifts to girls who have given them gifts, it takes place a month after Valentine's Day on March 14

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Koutarou's and Sanae's carefree discussion continued while Theia was just watching over the two. And since Yurika had stopped with her massaging, she too was just wordlessly staring at them.

If I ask him to give me something, would Koutarou comply…?

Having understood her own feelings, Theia was jealous of Sanae who was honest with her own feelings as she relied on Koutarou. But she had problems regarding to acting like Sanae did. If she began relying on Koutarou like Sanae did, she was sure he would think of her as some strange woman. And she was also scared of being rejected. Because of her pride and hidden cowardice, she couldn't use that to appeal to Koutarou.

“Your highness… Alright…”

Noticing her master acting like that, Ruth took action to fulfill her wish.

For starters, getting closer and creating a chance to talk should be good…

Ruth began preparing tea at once. After pouring up enough tea for everyone, Ruth called for Theia.

“Your highness, could you help me a little bit?”

“…Ah, eh…?”

Having been so focused on Koutarou and the others, Theia had missed what Ruth said. Ruth then repeated her question.

“Your highness, could you help me a little bit?”

“Ah, yes, okay.”

After taking one more look at Koutarou and the others, Theia approached Ruth. Seeing that, Ruth smiled at her.

“I've poured up tea for everyone, so could you carry yours and Satomi-sama's? I will carry everyone else's.”

“Koutarou's…”

Theia looked at Ruth's hands. There she saw a fragile tea cup made of Forthorthe design and a plain looking mug.

“Can I ask you to do it?”

Ruth smiled and whispered to Theia.

“Ah…”

Realizing Ruth's intentions, Theia slightly blushed and then looked towards Koutarou behind her.

“Ah… yes… if that's all, I will help…”

When she looked back towards Ruth, Theia's face was beet-red.

C-Calm down… I'm only bringing him some tea, what am I so shaken up for…

Theia tried to keep her heart from racing as she picked up a cup in each hand. Theia's shaken mind could be seen reflected in the cups as the surface of the tea shook.

“So I think you should show some gratitude to this beautiful ghost who always shows you her smile by saying ‘Thank you, Sanae-chan!’”

“K-Koutarou, I brought you some tea.”

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Suppressing her anxiousness, Theia approached Koutarou who was chatting away with Sanae. On her way, she began worrying if her actions were strange or not.

“Yeah.”

Koutarou continued talking to Sanae while casually receiving his mug. During that time, his hand slightly brushed up against Theia's.

“?!”

Greatly shaken by the sensation of Koutarou's hand, Theia almost dropped her own cup. She barely managed to save it, but the tea was rippling. And just when Theia was recovering, it happened.

“Oh, this is delicious. Thank you, your highness.”

Having taken a sip of the tea, Koutarou put his large hand on top of Theia's head and gently patted her.

“…Funyaa~”

A strange sound unconsciously leaked from Theia's mouth. At the same time, she dropped her tea cup.

The contents of the cup spilled out as it rolled along the tatami mat. Seeing that, Koutarou finally realized what he had done.

Oh no, I just did what I always do… This is Theia, not Charl…

Charl was a young girl that Koutarou and Clan had met during their travels. She would often bring tea that her sister had poured for Koutarou, and in return he would pat her on the head.

Because he had been distracted by his conversation with Sanae, he had acted out of instinct and treated Theia like he did to Charl.

Did I make her angry…?

Koutarou believed there was no way that someone with as much pride as Theia wouldn't be angry after being treated like a child. However, no matter how long he waited, Theia's roaring never came.

“Oh?”

“…”

Theia stared at Koutarou with her large eyes wide open. Her expression had frozen but her face was red. Seeing that, Koutarou felt an even greater sense of danger.

Not good, I might have made her really angry!

Koutarou had no way of knowing how Theia truly felt. He couldn't imagine that Theia would be happy with him patting her on the head, so he believed she would be enraged like always.

“…You can do it your highness, you're almost there!”

Watching over her master's appearance, Ruth clenched her hands. She unconsciously put so much force into her hands that she almost crushed her own tea cup.

“Ruth, wouldn't something more direct work better?”

“What?”

Kiriha, who had been silently sipping on her tea, put her cup down on the table and picked up something that was lying on the floor.

“That's Yurika-sama's…”

“Fufu.”

With a somewhat happy expression, she held that thing in both hands. That was the souvenir that Koutarou had brought back for Yurika, her new magical cane.

“How about something like this? Magnetism. Magnetism. Bond.”

Kiriha cast three spells using the cane.

This magical cane worked by reading the user's mind and applying an apt spell. Because of that, it didn't need a long incantation like Yurika used. As long as she clearly imagined what she said, the cane would do the rest.

Three lights appeared by the tip of the cane. First there were two red lights. They connected with Koutarou and Theia, and the two of them were wrapped in red light. Before long their bodies became magnetic.

“W-What!?”

“Wah, Wawawa!?”

Having suddenly become magnets, Koutarou and Theia were drawn towards each other and collided. They got entangled and fell down onto the floor. At the same time, the red light faded and the magnetism vanished. Because the magical power used for each spell was very little, powerful magnetism wouldn't last for long.

“Owow… what happened?”

“T-This is!?”

While the surprised Koutarou tried to get up from behind Theia, the third orange light hit them.

“Uwah!?”

“Kyaa!!”

The two of them lost their balance once more and fell down. The orange light's effect was to create a bond between two objects that were in contact. Because of that, Theia and Koutarou were stuck, with Koutarou holding Theia from behind.

“Are you okay!?”

“What is going on? My body is stuck and I can't get off!”

“Uwah!? K-Koutarou, don't move so suddenly!!”

The two of them forgot what they were doing up until now and were struggling on the floor. The first magnetic spell had vanished almost right away, but the second one was lasting for quite some time. Since it was such a simple spell it had a longer duration.

“Your highness, Satomi-sama!”

Ruth hurriedly ran up to the two and tried to help. Because of that, the only ones left by the table were Kiriha and her haniwas. Looking at Koutarou and the others struggling on the floor, she disappointedly dropped her shoulders.

“Hmm… it didn't go as well as I had hoped. Adjusting your power using magic is surprisingly difficult.”

Kiriha original goal had been to bond Koutarou and Theia's hands together. However, she had failed at adjusting the effect and only created a more confusing situation.

“Ho-, that's because you're relying on something unknown like that, Nee-san, Ho-!”

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“If you're going to rely on something, rely on us Ho-!”

“That seems to be better.”

Kiriha smiled elegantly, picked up her tea cup once more and took a sip. The tea that Ruth had poured was just as elegant as her smile.

“Hm!? Kiriha-san, is this your doing!?”

Seeing that smile and the magic cane still in her left hand, Koutarou noticed that Kiriha was responsible for this trouble.

“My bad, Koutarou. It didn't go as planned. It seems I'm not suited to be a magical girl.”

As she said that, Kiriha began twirling the cane around as if she was practicing baton twirling. Her skills at twirling were admirable and after avoiding hitting any furniture for a while, she stopped with the cane in both hands. She had claimed she wasn't suitable, but she looked far more like a magical girl than Yurika in her cosplay.

“Undo the spell right away!”

“No.”

Kiriha rejected Koutarou's demands without disturbing the smile on her lips.

“Or rather, I don't know how to undo it.”

“What!?”

Though her original plan had failed, Kiriha was still enjoying the confusion.

Part 4

The bonding spell that Kiriha had used had bonded Koutarou's chest with Theia's back. Moreover, since Koutarou had been holding onto Theia at the time, his arms were fixed to her.

At first, Theia's head had been attached to Koutarou's chest, but now she could freely move it. As time passed, the effectiveness of the spell dropped. At this rate, the two of them would be free within an hour or two.

At the same time, it meant that Koutarou and Theia would be stuck together for that amount of time. Koutarou was sitting down with his back against a wall. Meanwhile, Theia was sitting between Koutarou's legs, with her body leaning towards his chest. This was the most relaxing posture for the two of them.

Was Theia always this small?

Koutarou was puzzled by Theia's seemingly small body that he was holding in his hands. The image of her in his mind had always been that of a more powerful girl.

She's larger than Charl, but… she's quite small for someone of her age…

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Koutarou was puzzled by the difference between reality and his own image. Meanwhile, he unconsciously put force into his arms-

“Funyuu~”

As he did so, a strange sound leaked out. It was a quiet, sweet voice similar to when a cat or dog snuggled with a person.

“Ah, sorry.”

Hearing that, Koutarou hurriedly eased up. He was worried that he might have made it harder for Theia to breathe and apologized.

“It's fine. I-It's not your fault.”

“So should we forcibly try to pull apart?”

In reality, if Koutarou seriously tried, he would be able to forcibly overcome the power bonding the two. However, after their skin had turned red when he had tried to do so, they had decided not to overdo it.

But if it was painful for Theia, he believed it would be better to pull them apart.

“I-It's fine like this! I'd rather endure this than have my entire back turn red!”

Theia quickly rejected Koutarou's proposal. She had said she would endure it, but in reality, Theia wanted to stay like this for a while longer.

“Really? Well, if you say so.”

“Good…”

Theia slightly nodded and relaxed her body and leaned against Koutarou.

“Kiriha, how did you use this cane!? I want to try it too!!”

“Well, you see—”

“Y-Y-You can't! You can't just carelessly use magic!”

“Cheapskate. I'm not telling you to hand over the cane. Can't I just try it a little?”

“That's not the problem!”

Room 106 was as noisy as always. But when she closed her eyes, Theia didn't mind the noise. If anything, it sounded more like a lullaby to her right now.

I wonder what this sensation is…

The parts attached to Koutarou felt hot. That sensation reached her heart and warmed her chest. But in contrast to that, the inner part of her heart was calm. She felt a deep relief and gentle peace.

This was the first time she had felt that weird sensation. If anything, it was similar to what she had felt when she relied on her parents at a young age. But they weren't the same sensations. And because of that, Theia was able to find joy.

I wish we were stuck like this forever…

There was a sense of security that she hadn't felt ever since she realized she had been born as royalty. As she leaned towards Koutarou, she felt that strong sense of security. She believed that she would be absolutely safe as long as she was here.

And…

At the same time, she wanted to let Koutarou feel the same sensation she had felt. That's because she had noticed that deep inside, Koutarou felt lonely.

“…Did you fall asleep, Theia?”

At that time, Koutarou whispered into her ear. With her eyes still closed, she slowly shook her head.

“No. I just woke up.”

Before she knew it, Theia was holding onto Koutarou's hands. A few days ago, after Koutarou had disappeared and came back safely, finally, she had realized what it was she really wanted.

“Sorry, did I wake you up?”

“That's not what I meant… fufufu, oh well.”

Theia laughed. Since her eyes were still closed, Koutarou couldn't understand why.

“Did something happen to you?”

All he knew was that there had been a change in Theia's frame of mind.

“No. I've just been thinking about a lot of things lately.”

“For example?”

“For example… let's see…”

Theia opened her eyes and saw her hands on top of Koutarou's. She also saw her loyal vassal gently watching over her from a corner of the room.

“For example… how I should repay Ruth who always helps me out.”

Theia also wanted Ruth to feel the same way she did. They had always been together, so she didn't want to be the only one feeling this way.

“If that's the case, then I'll help.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Ruth-san has always been helping me out too.”

“Fufu.”

Theia laughed.

“What?”

“It's nothing. Can I really rely on you to cooperate?”

“Of course.”

“I trust a knight to not go back on his words.”

“Yeah. I'm not a knight though.”

“Fufufu.”

Theia laughed once more.

If everything turned out the way Theia wished it, if the future turned out the way she desired, then—

“What is it, really?”

“I won't tell. Fufufu, I definitely won't. As if! Fufufufu.”

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If this kind of trouble hadn't occurred, and if her back wasn't against Koutarou, she would never have felt that way. With that in her chest, Theia laughed out.

“It's a promise!”

From tomorrow onwards, Theia would probably return to normal. If she saw Koutarou's face she'd be obstinate, but if their hands touched she would blush; the normal Theia.

“I definitely won't forgive you if you regret it afterwards, Satomi Koutarou!”

“Why are you acting so serious for, we're just talking about repaying Ruth.”

“What's your answer!?”

“…As you wish, my princess.”

But now it was different.

Theia's smile was radiant.

The Birth of a Magical Girl?!

Part 5

A rhythmical sound was echoing in the passageways of the warship, Blue Knight.

That was the sound of Ruth's shoes beating on the Blue Knight's white floor. After the residents of room 106 had fallen asleep, Ruth was heading one of the hangars onboard the Blue Knight.

“Hmm Hmm~♪ Hm~hmm♪”

Ruth began humming to the rhythm of her steps. She was mysteriously cheerful, the steps that she made were almost as if she was dancing.

“Fufu, fufufufu.”

She would sometimes stop humming and instead cheerfully laugh. She normally never showed any strong emotions, so it was rare to see her this obviously happy.

“Isn't that great, your highness!”

Ruth was so cheerful because of Theia and Koutarou's appearances.

Every time she recalled the two, her cheeks would naturally slack and her feet would move on their own. Several hours had passed since then, but Ruth still could not contain her joy.

“Well done, Kiriha-sama! I'll make sure to give her some proper thanks the next time I see her!”

All of that was thanks to the spells that Kiriha had cast. At first it seemed to have been a failure, but the results were a great success. Ruth was very grateful towards Kiriha.

“Hm Hm Hmm♪ HmmHm♪”

That being said, it wasn't all good things. Ruth's feelings were so heightened that she couldn't fall asleep. So she had decided to give up on sleeping and instead start on some untouched work.

“Woops! I almost went past it♪”

Ruth walked past the hangar once, and quickly walked back with light steps. She then opened the door by rhythmically tapping on a nearby panel and entered.

Ruth's goal was a small maintenance area in the hangar. There was something she had to perform maintenance on there.

“Blue Knight, bring out Satomi-sama's maneuver suit.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

As Ruth spoke that order, a set of armor appeared out of nowhere. It was a vivid blue armor with the words “Theiamillis's Blue Knight” engraved on its chest. It was the Blue Knight's armor that Theia had given to Koutarou. Ruth had come to the hangar to perform maintenance on the armor.

“Blue Knight, do a check-up on the maneuver suit and make a list of all damaged areas. Also count how many spare parts there are for those areas.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

The armor stood up facing Ruth while being held up by an arm coming out from the wall. A diagnostic device was surrounding the armor, giving it a thorough examination.

“…It looks… pretty worn out…?”

As Ruth stared at the armor from the front, she noticed various kinds of damage on the armor.

The armor had a lot of small wounds, and its graceful blue color had slightly dimmed. And there were also a few large dents and burn marks.

“Are they damage from his battle with Clan-sama? Even for that, there are a lot of dents…”

Being a bit bothered by that, Ruth brought up the data from the diagnostic device. There she saw a detailed list of what kind of damage the armor had taken, seeing that, Ruth instinctively tilted her head.

“The abrasion of the joint bearing part is moderate. The shock absorber has broken down at two places. Because of repeated heating and impact, the brittleness of the armor has increased, replacing the plate is recommended…huh…?”

The data display showed a list of damage often appearing after being operated over a long period of time.

The joints had worn down from friction, the energy absorbing material had cracked, and durability of the armor had been reduced because of repeated heating. The accumulated damage was far more than something that would appear just from using it as a stage armor or fighting against Clan. The armor required an overhaul.

“Just how has Satomi-sama been using this…?”

Koutarou and Clan had disappeared for about two minutes. Ruth hadn't really thought about it up until now. She had only heard that they had gone to a different space-time plane for a short period of time and returned.

However, based on the damage the armor had accrued, one could only imagine that those two minutes had been very intense. Or maybe a massive gravitational field had altered the speed of time. Either way, it couldn't have been a simple matter of going and coming back.

“That's right, if I look at the memory…”

Ruth operated a nearby panel and accessed the armor's memory storage. By looking at the armor's video and audio recording, the record of used equipment and the computer's flow of information processing, she should be able to learn what had happened.

“NO DATA”

However, the information that was supposed to be there had all been deleted. Because of that, Ruth was unable to get her hands on any data.

“It's been erased… did Satomi-san do that? No, it must have been Clan-sama… but, why…?”

If they had just visited and returned from a different space-time plane, there would be no reason to erase the data. Which meant that since it had been erased, there was something they wanted to hide.

“Just what happened to Satomi-sama and Clan-sama…?”

They had been thrown to a different space-time, but something had happened there that had made the enemies, Koutarou and Clan, cooperate. Something that had caused the armor to be covered in damage. And they had erased the data in the armor to hide that something.

Ruth was able to draw the conclusion based on the armor's damage and the fact that the data had been erased.

“I should ask Satomi-sama for more details when I get the chance…”

Koutarou had told Ruth and the others that he had no choice but to cooperate with Clan after cutting the repulsion shell in half in order to return home to his own space-time. Since he had

brought back a magical cane, it must have meant that he had been sent to a planet where magic existed.

However, Ruth believed that Koutarou was hiding something very important from them.

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Part 1

Wednesday, February 3

Passing through the dim tunnel, brightness permeated through the windows. Right outside the vehicle was a silvery landscape. Though the clouds were blocking the sun, everyone was dazzled by the sparkling snow.

“Alright! Oh yeah! The mountain is calling for me!”

Koutarou's eyes were sparkling as well, as if trying to beat the snow, he pushed his face against the window of the bus. As a sports lover, the moment Koutarou saw the snow, he could barely contain himself.

“Please calm down a little, Satomi-kun.”

Kiriha called out to Koutarou, who was acting like a child whilst sitting next to her. They were surrounded by their classmates, so Kiriha spoke with more caution. However, her feelings were the same as always, and she happily watched over the restless Koutarou.

“Kiriha-san, when do we get there!?”

“It's still a while ahead. The bus will be driving up the mountain now.”

As she said that, Kiriha looked up front. In front of the bus, a mountain covered in white snow was growing larger. Koutarou and the other first years of Kitsushouharukaze high school were riding on eight buses that were heading towards a ski resort. As part of their school trip, they would be spending the next two days there, enjoying winter sports.

“About 30 more minutes or so.”

“Damnit, it's still that far off?”

Koutarou was still pressing his face against the window as he was talking to Kiriha. He was looking up at the ski resort, getting closer and closer.

“It's no use, Kiriha-san. Once he's like that, it's impossible to peel Kou off the window.”

Kenji's face popped up from behind Koutarou's seat. He was seated right behind him.

“Shut it, Mackenzie. A weakling like you can't understand the mountain.”

“You're just being a child. Are you a kindergartner!?”

Ski Resort and Signature Move

“I'd rather be a kindergartner than a weakling!”

Despite Kenji's cold glance, Koutarou didn't move away from the window.

“But it's dangerous like that, Satomi-kun.”

“Danger always accompanies the mountains.”

“That's not what I meant. Fufufu.”

Kiriha put her hand in front of her mouth and laughed. Her elegant smile had a calm beauty to it that was not found in any of their classmates. In fact, the boys who saw it were smitten, but Koutarou who had his face pushed up against the window showed no reaction.

“Satomi-kun, it's dangerous so please sit back down.”

“Like I said, it's impossible. I've tried for several years.”

“Is that so?”

Kenji dropped his shoulders in amazement, despite that, Kiriha smiled. She then brought her mouth closer to Koutarou's ear and whispered.

“…Sit down, Satomi Koutarou. Do you want me to use magic once more?”

In that short moment, Kiriha had a suspicious, provocative smile.

“Uh.”

Her words had a profound effect. Koutarou who had stubbornly refused to move away from the window awkwardly sat back down on his seat.

“Sorry for getting overly excited about skiing!”

“Very good.”

Kiriha smiled at Koutarou who had sat back down. She pulled out a meatbun from her luggage and gave it to Koutarou.

“Eat this and calm down a little.”

“Yes, it would be my honor!”

Koutarou opened his mouth anxiously while Kiriha pushed the meatbun in with her delicate fingers. The meatbun was supposed to be delicious, but Koutarou was too anxious to taste anything.

“Kou, what happened to you?”

Kenji was astonished to see Koutarou and Kiriha like that. According to his own experience, it was impossible to make Koutarou listen to anything in that state. However, Kiriha had easily done so, and Kenji couldn't believe it.

“Mackenzie, you don't know this woman's true nature. She's actually—”

“Would you like another?”

“—Mugh.”

Before Koutarou could say something unnecessary, Kiriha stuffed another meatbun into his mouth.

“Mghm, mmh.”

“Kiriha-san, what did Kou say?”

“Hgmm, mhhh.”

“What… w-well…”

Kiriha blushed and looked down.

“H-He was just remembering the intimate times we… spent together♡”

“Whaaaaaat!?”

The next moment, Koutarou, who was struggling to breath because of the meatbun, had plastic bottles, shoes, magazine and various other objects thrown at him.

Having a ton of things thrown at him as he struggled to breathe, Koutarou passed out for a moment. Once he woke up, the person who was supposed to have been sitting next to him had suddenly vanished.

“D-Dammit, that Kiriha-san…”

“Are you okay, Koutarou?”

“That was unfortunate, Satomi-san.”

Sanae and Yurika were helping Koutarou out by working together to remove the items thrown at him.

“…Thanks you two.”

“Koutarou, you definitely shouldn't go out with that woman.”

“That's right. Satomi-san only needs to go out with Sakuraba-senpai.”

“T-That aside, Yurika.”

Koutarou knocked away the dust on his clothes and got up.

“What?”

“Don't ever give Kiriha-san that magical cane. Who knows what she'd do for fun.”

In this case, Koutarou was the most likely victim. Of course, the damage would be far greater than having things thrown at him.

“Okay.”

Yurika responded with a powerful nod. She was not about to permit the misuse of magic either.

“Not even if she gives you something delicious.”

“O-Okay!”

Yurika nodded again. However, her determination had already started to waver.

“Not even if she tells you a scary story.”

“I-I-It's fine! Probably! Yurika fight! Yurika fight!”

Yurika nervously nodded and cheered for herself.

“…Are you sure?”

“I'm sorry, I'm not actually confident!”

It seemed like the security of the new magical cane was far weaker than Koutarou had hoped for.

Theia looked over at Koutarou and the others while standing up from her seat. After confirming that Koutarou was alright, she let out a sigh of relief and sat back down.

“Your highness, you could just go to Satomi-sama's side.”

Ski Resort and Signature Move

“L-Like I could do something like that! Despite this, I'm—”

“A girl, right?”

“…”

Theia's face turned red and she stared down. She was about to say princess, but the word had been caught in her throat and wouldn’t come out.

“Your highness, if there's something you want, you can't just wait for it.”

“…”

Theia said nothing while still looking down. Her long golden hair hid her face, so Ruth couldn't tell what kind of expression Theia was making.

“You can't rely on the fact that Kiriha-sama will always be helping either.”

This might have been harder to understand than the magic trouble they had the other day night, but Ruth believed that Kiriha did it for Theia's sake. That by putting Koutarou in the center of trouble, Theia would come to help him.

Instead, Sanae and Yurika had gone to Koutarou's side. While she was hesitating, they had made the first move. If Theia didn't take action herself, she wouldn't be able to see any results, no matter how many chances Kiriha made for her. On top of that, there was a limit to Kiriha's cooperation. Despite noticing her own wish, all would be for nothing if she didn't do anything.

“I know… Even I know that I can't go on like this…”

Theia finally opened her mouth. However, the words that left her lips were timid, and it was hard to believe they came from the bullish girl.

“But I don't understand… I've only interacted with other people by showing my power. And changing to a different method now is… impossible for me to imagine. Just what should I be doing…?”

Theia had been born a princess and lived bargaining with people she couldn't trust. And to survive that kind of life, she had made others follow her through force. She had only interacted with other people with that kind of method.

Theia's wish was not to make Koutarou follow her like that. However, that was the only way she knew how. That left Theia greatly confused. Because of that, she couldn't make a move, despite the opportunities.

“Then, just show him your power.”

“Eh…?”

Theia instinctively raised her head. She had not expected what Ruth said.

“It's meaningless to show my power. By doing that, my wish won't be fulfilled…”

“If you just show your normal power, that might be the case.”

Ruth put her hand on her chest and gently smiled at Theia.

“You have a different power you can show him, your highness.”

“A different… power…?”

“Yes. That is the power of thinking of others. If you make use of all that power without holding back, I'm sure he will understand, no matter what you do. Be it playing games, drinking tea or fighting.”

Ruth's words were powerful. A strong belief resided in her eyes.

Ski Resort and Signature Move

How can you be so certain, why didn't you hesitate…?

Theia couldn't feel any hesitation coming from Ruth, so she wanted to know just what supported Ruth's belief.

“Our 'Theiamillis's Blue Knight' isn't the kind of thick-headed knight who wouldn't understand that.”

Ruth gently smiled as she said that. When Theia looked at her face, she understood what Ruth had been trying to say.

I see… so that's what you believe in…

Ruth believed that there was no way that the one Theia desired would ever actively ignore just her feelings. She had begun to desire it since that wasn't the case,

“…Ruth.”

Having understood what Ruth believed in, a small smile finally appeared on Theia's face.

“Yes, your highness?”

“You just said ‘our,’ did you not?”

Theia questioned Ruth. However, her words were gentle. She was in no way criticizing Ruth.

“Yes. That is indeed what I said.”

Ruth responded with the same strong belief she had shown before.

“Then… are you fine like that?”

In fact, Theia was the one who had shown a slightly apologizing expression.

“Yes. My ideal man is someone who will support your highness.”

“You're not being very honest either…”

A bitter expression mixed with Theia's smile. However, Ruth shook her head.

“No, I simply believe. Very stubbornly, I might add.”

“Fufufu… then I should believe as well.”

“In what, if I may ask?”

Ruth already knew. Despite knowing, she asked because she wanted Theia to put it into words.

“In our 'Theiamillis's Blue Knight.’”

Theia had just said what Ruth had hoped for. She believed it was a wonderful thing that Theia had spoken those words.

“Yes… as you wish, my princess…”

Theia and Ruth smiled at each other.

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Part 2

To the girl known as Nijino Yurika, a ski resort could be likened to hell. Not only did she dislike exercising, she also hated the cold. And since she lacked endurance and diligence, she wasn't good at skiing at all.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaa!!”

Because of that, shortly after she got off the lift, Yurika would lose her balance.

“Save meeeeee, Satomi-saaaaaaaan!!”

As her figure had gotten rounder because of her thick clothing, Yurika rolled down the ski slope like a barrel.

“Ah, Yurika!?”

Koutarou quickly gave chase. However, the speed she was rolling down was abnormal as she sped down the slope. Although he might love sports, as a skiing amateur, the gap between Koutarou and Yurika only grew.

“Save me, Satomi-saaaan!!”

Yurika looked like she would roll on forever, but…

“Uffh.”

She rolled into a pile of newly fallen snow and stopped. She punched a hole in the pile and her legs were all that were sticking out.

“Wah, that looks bad, Koutarou!”

“Sanae, go on ahead and see if she’s alright!”

“Okay!”

Sanae let go of Koutarou's back and flew towards Yurika. Since she could freely fly, it went faster than skiing. Thanks to that she was able to reach Yurika before anyone else.

“Are you okay, Yurika?”

“I-I'm nooot.”

Yurika was stuck in the snow and unable to move. She tried to move her arms, but there was no room in the snow. The only thing she could do was kick her legs, but that wouldn't help with her situation.

That was when Koutarou arrived, sliding down sideways and stopping right next to the pile.

“How does it look?”

“She doesn't seem to be hurt, but she can't get out.”

“Save me~~~, Satomi-saaaaaan.”

Yurika's voice was being slightly muffled by the snow. Based on her voice and how she was kicking her legs, Koutarou understood that she was fine.

“Geez…”

After taking a sigh of relief, Koutarou removed his skis and approached the area where Yurika was stuck.

“Hey, are you okay, Yurika?”

“Yees, I'm not hurt.”

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Yurika's miserable voice responded to Koutarou's question.

“Are you stuck?”

“I can't move my arms, so I probably can't get out on my own.”

The hole was shaped after Yurika and she was unable to escape on her own. So, Koutarou reluctantly put his hands on Yurika's legs sticking out.

“Kyaa Kyaa!? W-What!?”

Yurika, unable to tell head from tails, panicked and began struggling.

“Pervert! Molester! Why are you taking advantage of me not being able to move to touch me!?”

“You're wrong!! Stay still, Yurika!! I'll pull you out from there!!”

“Your fingers are moving very suspiciously- oh, so that's what you were doing.”

However, when she realized that Koutarou was trying to pull her out, she stopped flailing.

“Okay, Satomi-san. Hurry up and save me.”

“…You bastard, maybe I should just bury you instead…”

Despite being irritated by Yurika's behavior, Koutarou grabbed a hold of her legs.

“Here I go, Yurika!”

“Okay.”

At the same time as she answered, Koutarou put all of his force behind his arms.

“Ouch, owowowow!!”

Yurika began screaming right away and began kicking her legs, struggling.

“H-Hey Yurika, stop moving!”

“B-, ow, but it hurts!! Owowowow!!”

“In that case!!”

Yurika kept struggling, saying that it hurts, but at this rate they wouldn't get anywhere. Koutarou ignored her pleas to stop and pulled using all of his weight. Just like that, he pulled Yurika out, along with the snow around her from the pile.

“Owowow…”

“Are you okay, Yurika?”

Yurika rubbed her neck with tears in her eyes. That was the part that had been hurting the most when Koutarou was pulling her.

“I thought my head was gonna get torn off.”

“Don't be so dramatic. It's just snow.”

“Show some guts.”

“You're wrong~”

“Which one?”

“The deeper snow is denser and harder, and that's where my head was stuck~”

“But in the end it's just snow, right?”

“You're wrong! Satomi-san, I think you should be gentler with me!”

Ski Resort and Signature Move

“I don't care.”

While Koutarou and the others were talking on top of the snow, their classmates came skiing down the slope. It was a pair on skis and snowboard respectively. They approached Koutarou and the others with great speed as they crossed each other’s trails.

They then hit the brakes and stared at Koutarou and the others after stopping.

“What are you doing, Kou?”

“What are you sitting in a place like this for?”

The ones who had come were Kenji and Shizuka. Kenji had a snowboard, and Shizuka had skis. The two of them were quite skilled.

“…Yurika crashed into that snow pile over there and got stuck. I just helped her get free.”

Koutarou responded in a bad mood as he wiped off the snow from his face that had been kicked up by Kenji's and Shizuka's flashy braking. Yurika, who didn't try to wipe the snow off then tried to appeal to them.

“Satomi-san is just terrible! Even though I said it hurt, he just forcibly pulled me out! I thought I was about to lose my head!!”

“Nijino-san, Kou's been reckless like that since he was a child.”

Kenji followed Yurika's lead. Trying to release his built up frustration, he complained to Yurika.

“Just the other day he woke me up using hot water, you know!? He definitely needs to be gentler with me!!”

“I know how you feel. He's normally that rough.”

“So you understand, Matsudaira-san!!”

“Yes!”

Yurika and Kenji shook at each other’s hands and rejoiced at having found someone who understood them.

“What are those two doing?”

Koutarou and Shizuka looked at those two with cold glances.

“They've already moved past the pain and are just complaining now… Oh, right, Satomi-kun.”

“Yes?”

“Regardless of what happened, the truth is that she fell, right? Her neck might really be hurting, so it might be better to take her to the hotel’s infirmary.”

“Infirmary!? I'll go! I'll go!”

The moment she heard the words infirmary, Yurika's eyes began sparkling.

“…You just don't want to ski anymore, don't you?”

“You're wrong! Ouch, ow, Satomi-san, my neck, my neck is hurting!”

Yurika brushed aside Koutarou's suspicious glance. She held her neck with both hands and appealed to Koutarou, saying it was hurting with a smile on her face.

This girl… she's planning on using her neck pain as an excuse to skip…

Not only did she dislike exercising, she also hated the cold. It was obvious that she wasn't planning on coming back.

“Fine, I got it. Let's go to the infirmary, Yurika.”

“Really!? Thank you!! I knew you were a gentle person when we first met!!”

Yurika grabbed a hold of Koutarou's hands and shook them up and down.

“That's right, you've been very gentle lately, Satomi-san must really love me~”

Yurika was ecstatic over not having to ski for a while.

“…Don't get so full of yourself…”

“Are you sure? She doesn't look hurt.”

“What can I do? There's also the chance that she actually is.”

Koutarou was well aware of Yurika's underlying motives, but he couldn't leave things like they were. He sighed and stood up, and then dragged Yurika up as well.

“Let's go, Yurika.”

“Oka~y.”

“Satomi-kun, Mackenzie-kun and I will take care of the skis.”

“Please do, thank you, landlord-san.”

“…What, no thanks to me, Kou?”

“Koutarou, I don't like infirmaries, so I'll go play with Theia and the others.”

“Yeah. You do that.”

Theia and Ruth were in the middle of being taught how to ski by Kiriha. Tagging along to the infirmary would just be boring, so Sanae would rather go join up with them.

“Well, I'll leave the rest to you, landlord-san, Mackenzie.”

“Satomi-san, Satomi-san, can you give me a piggyback ride?”

A thud rang out.

“Don't get too full of yourself.”

“…Oka~y…”

And so, Koutarou and Yurika walked down the slope. Sanae had already gone looking for Theia and the others, so the only ones remaining were Shizuka and Kenji. Kenji stared at Koutarou and Yurika's backs as they were talking and tilted his head.

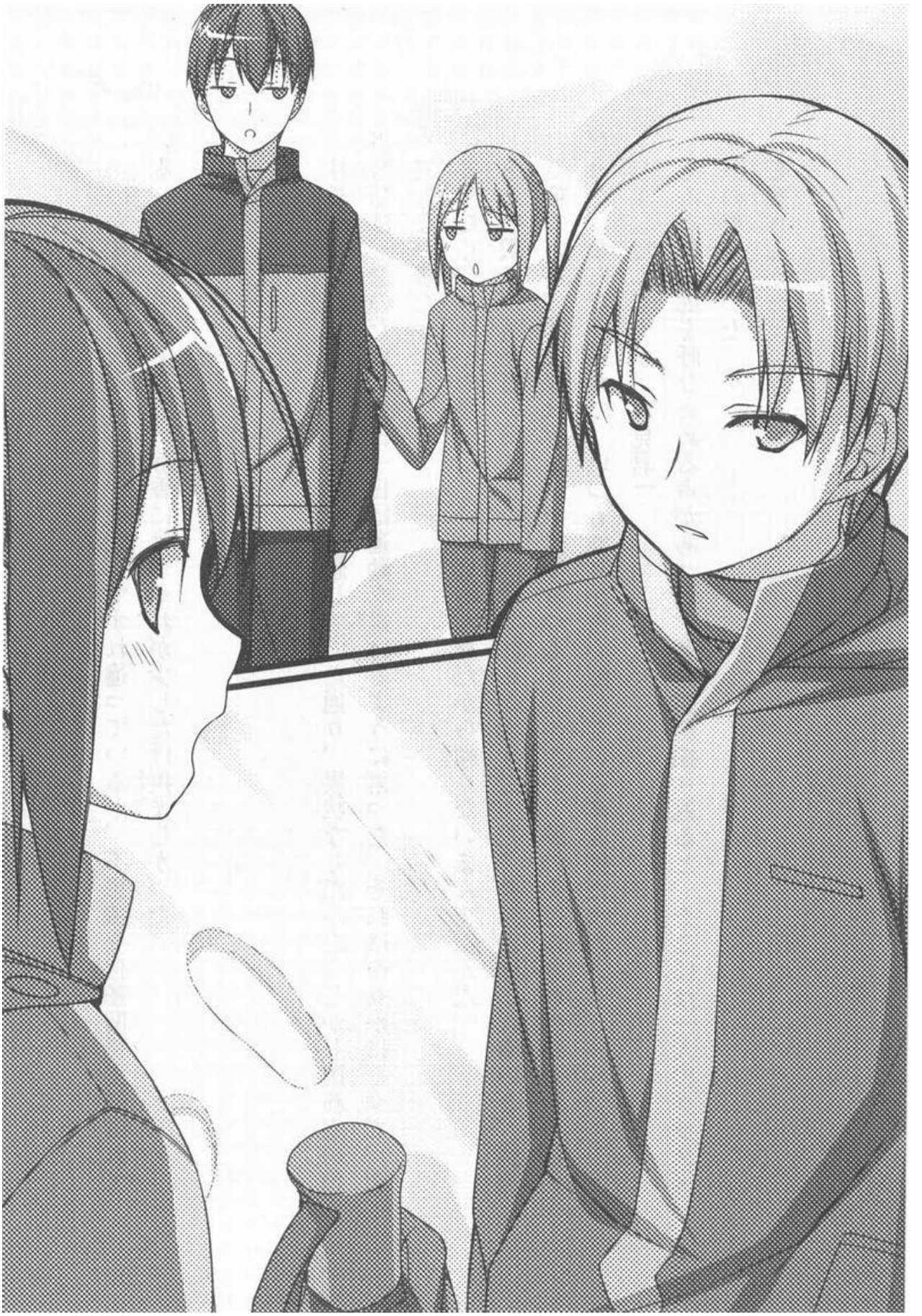
“…Kasagi-san, are those two going out?”

Shizuka's eyes opened wide after hearing Kenji's words.

“Satomi-kun and Yurika-chan!? Why!?”

“Why, well… don't they seem too close for just classmates? It's like they give you no room to join in…”

Ski Resort and Signature Move



Ski Resort and Signature Move

“Ah, they certainly have that atmosphere to them…”

Shizuka stopped picking up the skis that had been left behind and also looked at Koutarou and Yurika's retreating backs.

Yurika was talking to Koutarou, making large gestures while he responded with his various expressions and sometimes hit Yurika on her head.

“But I don't think they're going out. They're both bad at hiding secrets, so I'm pretty sure.”

“That's true… but, hmm…”

Kenji wasn't satisfied, but he didn't think they were secretly going out. To him, the two had a very strange relationship.

It's only natural for it to be strange to you Mackenzie-kun. In reality, the two of them are living together…

While feeling a sense of admiration for Kenji's observation abilities, Shizuka smiled wryly. The reason Koutarou and Yurika were so close was because they lived together in room 106. As the time passed, they had gotten closer and closer.

Well, the same goes through for the other girls too…

Although the residents of room 106 had different interests, they had built up a mutual trust between one another. And Shizuka, who had lost her family, felt somewhat envious of that.

Part 3

Yurika's diagnosis was just what Koutarou had assumed: nothing out of order. However, the doctor in charge had decided to keep Yurika from exercising for a day, just to be on the safe side. That was just what Yurika had hoped for.

“Really, that Yurika… this is why she's so unreliable.”

Because of that, only Koutarou had come back from the infirmary. Yurika had gone to sleep instead. Returning to the slopes, Koutarou's head was full of thoughts of Yurika. Despite his attitude, he was always worried about Yurika.

“What's wrong, Satomi-kun?”

A classmate called out to Koutarou as he was wandering about.

“Oh, Aika-san.”

“That's a gloomy expression you have there. Is something wrong?”

The voice belonged to a girl named Aika Maki. She was a transfer student who had transferred to their school around the start of winter. Maki was supposedly one of Yurika's acquaintances, but she was a girl who left a weak impression, and Koutarou didn't have many memories of her.

“Yurika hurt her neck, so I took her to the infirmary, but…”

“My, Yurika-san did?”

Hearing that Yurika had been injured, Maki's eyes opened wide.

“The diagnosis said there was nothing wrong with her, but she refused to leave.”

Koutarou had a dissatisfied expression and looked at the door behind him. Past that door was Yurika sleeping in a warm bed.

“I see…”

Having had the situation explained to her, Maki's expression suddenly got sharper.

Regardless of circumstances, this is my chance to investigate…

Maki had been trying to make contact with Koutarou these last few days. Having decided that this was her chance, Maki approached him.

Maki left the information gathering regarding room 106 to an automated tool she had set up before they went on the school trip. All that was left was to question Koutarou, then the majority of her goals would be complete.

And this is also my chance to outsmart this man. Maki, don't be too rash, just thread carefully…

Maki called out to Koutarou with a smile after talking herself down from doing anything rash.

“Then could you speak with me for a moment, Satomi-kun? I'll buy you a drink.”

However, in contrast to her smile, Maki was getting more and more nervous.

While Maki had gone to buy juice at the vending machine, she activated two spells that had been dormant. One was the spell to allow the user to see through lies, and the other was a camouflage magic that concealed the magic power that was being emitted.

She didn't want to be fooled by Koutarou's slick tongue, so she decided to use a spell that let her see through lies. But she also didn't want him to realize she was using a spell, so she camouflaged her magic power.

Maki had prepared these spells before she made contact with Koutarou.

The rest is up to me…

Maki pulled herself together and approached Koutarou with two plastic bottles in her hands.

“Here, Satomi-kun.”

“Sorry for making you treat me.”

At that time, Maki could see a green light surrounding Koutarou's body. That light was from the magic spell that only Maki could see, and whenever Koutarou lied it would become unstable.

It doesn't look like he's lying so far…

The light surrounding Koutarou was a steady green, proof that he wasn't lying.

“Let's speak sitting down.”

“Yeah.”

Maki and Koutarou sat down at a bench in the corner of the hotel's lobby.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

Koutarou asked, while he removed the cap from his bottle and put it by his lips. Koutarou hadn't told Maki what he wanted, but inside the bottle was Koutarou's favorite drink, cola.

“Well… it's about Yurika-san.”

“Yurika?”

Taking care not to look unnatural, Maki removed the cap from her bottle too and she began speaking after taking a sip.

“Yes, that's right. Things haven't been going well with Yurika-san lately…”

Since Maki hated lies, she wasn't outright lying herself. Since they were enemies, the truth was that things weren't going well.

“So please tell me, did something happen to Yurika-san lately?”

Maki said that very naturally. Because of that, to Koutarou, it looked like as if the transfer student was worried that her friend had changed.

“Do you mean since you transferred here?”

“Yes. I think it's something very recent.”

The magic power in room 106 had recently grown much larger. Something should have happened involving either Yurika or Koutarou. So Maki started out by confirming if something had happened to Yurika.

“Recently, huh…”

Koutarou began thinking.

Something major happened to me, but… Yurika's the same as always… the only thing that's happened with her is making children cry with her acting as Alunaya, isn't it? But that probably has nothing to do with why things won't go well with Maki-san…

“Sorry, I can't think of anything.”

In the end, Koutarou had concluded so. He had no memory of anything major happening to Yurika.

The light is stable… So does that mean Satomi Koutarou is the reason for the magic power’s growth? Or was it the enemy he fought during the play?

The light enveloping Koutarou was still a stable green. It proved that Koutarou was telling the truth, so she began thinking of all kinds of possibilities.

“…No, wait.”

Koutarou remembered something and his expression changed.

Could you call that a substantial change?

Koutarou had no recollection of any troubles regarding Yurika, but he did about the opposite.

“So did something happen?”

“Yeah. Actually, Yurika's dream was finally fulfilled.”

Koutarou had remembered that he had given her a magical cane as a present.

Thanks to that cane, she was able to use real magic, though it was weak. To Koutarou, it was like giving her a tool for self-defense, but to Yurika it might have been a big deal. In truth, Yurika was crying from joy at the time.

“Because of the complicated circumstances I can't go into details, but the dream she wished for with all of her heart finally came true. So she might have changed a little.”

“The dream she wished for with all her heart…?”

Maki knew what Yurika's dream was. That dream was that she wanted to become a splendid magician. A splendid magician that could fulfill the duties of her predecessor, Rainbow Nana.

If that dream has been fulfilled it means… she's drawn out the magic power and gotten a hold of great power? Or Yurika's magic power has increased somehow, which made it look like the magic power in room 106 had grown?

Either Yurika became a splendid magician using the magic power in room 106 or her magic power has grown because she became a splendid magician.

The light around Koutarou was still a stable green, meaning he wasn't lying. So Maki began thinking in that way.

“So, could you please wait a little until Yurika can settle in?”

“…I see, I understand.”

Koutarou and Maki's conversation weren't connecting at all; they were both talking about something completely different. Despite that, both of their conclusions were that Yurika had become a splendid magician. Since neither of them was lying, neither of them noticed the difference in their conversation.

Either way, the increase in magic power has been added into Yurika's magic power… Things have gotten problematic…

Maki took another sip of her cola. It was one of her few favorites.

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Part 4

After separating with Koutarou, Maki hid in the woods around the ski resort and contacted her allies using a magic tool.

This magic tool had a similar shape and size to the charms sold in temples. Because of the tool's portability, it was only possible to talk to one person at a time. The person that Maki had contacted was the girl in purple.

"Purple, it's me."

"Navy… what is it?"

"There's something I wanted to report to you right away."

Maki quickly reported on her affairs, trying not to waste any time.

"It seems like the increase in magic power we talked about has been added to Yurika's magic power."

"What!?"

Even the normally calm girl in purple instinctively held her breath.

"Are you sure!?"

"Yes, sadly it is the truth. That's the information I obtained after making contact with Satomi Koutarou. I've already confirmed that he was speaking the truth."

If the increase in magic power in room 106 was all under Yurika's control, Maki and the others had no chance of winning. It was obvious that they'd be sent flying if they tried.

The truth of the matter, however, was that Yurika hadn't gone through a power up. The cane Koutarou had brought home allowed for the use of all kinds of spells, but the power itself was weak. So she hadn't gotten stronger at all, but since Maki held such hostility against Yurika and Koutarou, she had just misunderstood. Of course, Darkness Rainbow had no way of knowing that. And because of Maki's hostility, the girls were about to have yet another grand misunderstanding about Koutarou and Yurika.

"That's bad…"

"Yes, we should avoid a direct clash. We'll suffer an even more crushing defeat than we did against Rainbow Nana."

"I understand. I'll think of what we will do next, you continue investigating— wait up Navy, Green is saying something."

With those words as her last, the girl in purple stopped talking.

After several minutes, the Purple's voice came from the magic tool once more.

"…Navy, are you listening?"

"Yes, I've been bored to death with waiting."

"According to Green, a powerful demon has appeared at the top of mountain near you. It arrived there at roughly the same time you did."

"A powerful demon…?"

In Maki's and the others home country of Folsaria, apart from humans, there were also abnormal looking monsters known as demons. Some of them would sometime stray to Earth and create chaos. A lot of the monsters and devils in legends were actually demons from Folsaria.

“We want you to capture that and make it your familiar. Normally we'd send you some reinforcement, but I’m afraid we're not in a position where we can do that. That said, if we leave it alone, Rainbow Heart will exterminate it.”

One of the jobs of the army Yurika was a part of, Rainbow Heart, was to exterminate demons that had strayed to Earth. So sooner or later this demon would likely meet the same fate.

“…So in this situation where Yurika's magic power has increased, you want to increase our allies, even if it comes at a risk, huh?”

Maki realized what the girl in purple wanted to say, and said it out first.

“That's right. Will you give it a shot?”

“I'll do it. Fortunately, creating familiar is my specialty.”

A familiar was a demon that followed the orders of a magician.

In order to employ a familiar, one either needed to bind it using contracts and curses, or manipulate its mind with magic. Maki preferred the latter; she specialized in utilizing manipulation magic. So she was perfect for the job.

“Besides, I need to get some more power too or I can't win against Yurika or that man.”

“We're counting on you, Navy.”

“Yes… Hm?”

At that moment, Maki could sense that someone was approaching her.

“Purple, I'll contact you later. It looks like I'm getting a guest.”

“Take care, Navy.”

After finishing her communication, Maki put her magic tool into her bosom. When she turned around, she saw a lone girl approaching her.

“As expected of Yurika. To think you could sense magic as feeble as this.”

“Maki-chan, what are you doing using magic in a place like this?”

Yurika's expression was more serious than usual. The complete opposite of carefree expression she showed Koutarou and the others daily.

Yurika had sensed the magic Maki was using and came here. It had been communication magic, but Yurika was cautious of Maki using magic at this timing. For the past few months, Maki hadn't taken any aggressive actions and just acted like a classmate. She didn't use magic or give Yurika an opening to use. Despite that, Maki was using magic during this school trip. It was something that Yurika couldn't ignore.

“Do you think I have an obligation to answer you?”

A smile appeared on Maki's lips and she gave Yurika a thorough check.

From what I can tell, she's not powered up in her current state… Maybe her cane has something to do with it?

Yurika was currently wearing colorful ski wear just like Maki. Maki couldn't sense any difference in magic power in Yurika's current state. So she started thinking that Yurika's outfit or cane was covered in strong magic instead.

“…I don't know what you're doing, Maki-chan, but I'll be your opponent if I have to.”

The snow creaked under Yurika's feet. She mustered up her courage and took a step towards Maki. She was terribly scared of fighting, but as a magical girl, she couldn't just retreat.

“Those are some big words, Rainbow Yurika. Can you really beat me with your skills?”

“It's not a matter of winning. It's my duty.”

The Yurika in the past probably would have run away from this situation. But ever since she came to room 106, the courage she had slowly gathered was now supporting her.

Win…? I'll definitely win and protect everyone… so I can graduate together with Satomi-san and the others!

It wasn't courage as a magical girl. It was just a girl's, Nijino Yurika's, courage. In order to protect her life in room 106 and Kitsushouharukaze high school; the courage needed to do so burned inside Yurika. Even Koutarou hitting her across the head before was now adding to her courage.

“That's awfully confident of you… let's see how long you can keep that up.”

As she said that, Maki readied herself.

This courage coming from Yurika who would always run away… She must have gained considerable magic power…

Maki wasn't as optimistic about the situation as she sounded. She imagined that she didn't stand much of a chance winning, taking Yurika's supposedly drastic increase in magic power into account.

And this footing… this place is disadvantageous to me…

Maki was standing on new snow. She fought using a combination of mind manipulation magic and martial arts. In comparison, Yurika fought primarily relying on long range spells. Because of that, Maki had a disadvantage in the snow where she would have a hard time moving. With that in her mind, Maki decided that she should prioritize getting a familiar.

But just running away isn't my style!

But a fire started burning in Maki's eyes. No matter how strong Yurika had gotten, her pride wouldn't allow her to just run away without putting up a fight.

“Here I come, Nijino Yurika!!”

Maki thrust her right arm forwards.

“Maki-chan!?”

Yurika response was slightly delayed and she put both of her hands in front of her.

“Come, Nightwalker!”

“Come! Angel Halo! Encyclopedia!”

In response to their shouts, a cane appeared in front of Maki's right hand, and another cane appeared in front of each of Yurika's hands for a total of three canes.

Maki's cane was called Nightwalker. The cane in front of Yurika's right hand was Angel Halo, and the one in her left was Encyclopedia. The two of them grabbed their canes that appeared midair, raised the one in their right hands above their heads and began focusing.

She has two canes!?

Maki was surprised by Yurika having a cane in each hand. She had made the first move, but her incantation was slightly delayed because of her surprise, so they ended up incanting at the same time.

“Costume Change – Modifier Quick – End – Permanent!”

This spell was to change their outfits. The two of them were wrapped in blue light and their ski wear was replaced by a different outfit. After the blue light had faded, Yurika and Maki were wearing a pink and indigo colored magical outfit respectively and facing each other.

“And!”

“What!?”

Maki's incantation ended there, but Yurika's continued.

“Armed – Angel Halo!”

After finishing her incantation, the cane she was holding above her head, Angel Halo, began emitting an orange light which gradually grew large enough to envelop it, obscuring its silhouette. Once the light had reached its brightest and obscured the cane, the orange light suddenly divided into several different colored balls of light.

“She armed her cane!?”

While Maki was taken back in surprise, the balls of light flew into Yurika's body, one after another. Into her head, her back, her chest, her arms and legs. Every time a ball of light crashed into her body, the clothes in that area began changing shape.

The balls of light that crashed into her limbs and chest transformed and added glowing white decorations. The ball of light that crashed into her back transformed and added angelic looking wings. And the final ball of light that had crashed into her head transformed into what could only be described as an angel's halo.

Thanks to this transformation, divinity and amazement was added to Yurika's normally exposing outfit.

“The magical girl of love and courage ☆ Rainbow Yurika!”

And as her body glowed white, she swung her other cane, Encyclopedia around using both hands.

“I will protect the peace of this city!”

Yurika pointed her cane towards Maki. Her dignified stance made her look powerful.

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Ski Resort and Signature Move

“I see, so that's your new power…”

Seeing Yurika's new appearance, Maki held her breath.

She prepared two canes, binding powerful magic into one of them and arming the other. And while fighting normally, she would look for a chance to unleash the bound magic power.

I see you put some thought into this, Nijino Yurika!

Normally, a lone magician could only use a limited number of spells at the same time. However, by using powerful magic tools, it was possible to increase that number. Maki believed that Yurika would use room 106's magic power in such a fashion.

“That new cane doesn't hold a lot of power.”

“It may be insignificant power, but things won't go the same as before!”

“Insignificant… do you think I'll fall for that?”

Maki ground her teeth.

Highly dense magic power from artifact-rank magic tools, the highest level of magical tools whose means of creation has been lost, was flowing out from Encyclopedia. Having Yurika called that insignificant slightly irritated Maki.

Ah~, I hope my bluff won't be seen through!

However, Yurika was secretly anxious. It was true that the cane she had gotten from Koutarou held large amounts of magic power. However, like its name alludes to, it was sort of like an encyclopedia. Since it could use a vast amount of spells without relying on the user, the power of each spell was weak and below average. It was flexible but weak. So rather than relying on Encyclopedia's power, she was putting her hope in being able to use magic in front of Koutarou and the others. If she used magic in this appearance, Koutarou and the others wouldn't suspect her. And since it held a lot of magic power, it also worked as a bluff against Maki. That's all the meaning the cane held to Yurika, whose magic repertoire was wide enough as it was.

“I guess I'll give it a shot…”

Maki readied her own cane. Her goal also included confirming Yurika's abilities. Now that she's shown her new power, it was necessary to examine to what extent it had reached.

You can't show weakness now, Yurika! Even I have grown a little since then!

Yurika mustered up her own courage and pointed her cane towards Maki.

“Sanctuary – Modifier – Effective Area – Colossal!”

The two of them began their incantation at the same time. It was a spell to keep the people in the area away. It was an unwritten law that magicians use this when fighting against one another, and it also served as the gong to start the fight.

Part 5

“Quick Cast – Acceleration!!”

Maki was the first to move. After casting a spell that improved her reaction speed, she began closing the distance between her and Yurika.

As I thought, the footing is poor!

However, as expected, Maki was unable to move as quickly as she'd like to because of the snow. Despite that, she still moved faster than a normal person, but it still gave Yurika a chance to attack.

“Multiple Energy Bolt – Target Option – Spread!!”

The spell Yurika chose created multiple magic arrows to attack its target. Those magic arrows normally worked like a machine gun, but Yurika changed their effect to work more like a shotgun. It was a necessary trick to make in order to score a hit on the quick Maki.

“Tsk, Quick Cast – Anti-Magic Shield!!”

However, Maki wouldn't just take that lying down. Before Yurika could fire off her glowing red magic arrows, Maki created a translucent yellow shield.

Yurika's magic shots smashed into it like rain. Since Yurika mass produced the shots to keep them firing, their power was weaker, so the shield Maki had created easily blocked them.

“Tiny Memory Flash – Modifier – Touch Trigger!”

Protected by the magic shield, Maki charged forward. At the same time, her cane began glowing indigo. That light was from her specialty, mind manipulation magic that induces a short term memory lapse. She infused her own cane with the spell so that it would activate at the same time she struck her target.

“Take this, Yurikaaa!!”

As Maki wound up for her swing, the shield protecting her vanished. She couldn't attack while defending.

“Now!!”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaa!!”

In that moment, the snow below Maki's feet suddenly went loose. It struck her feet and slightly lifted her up.

It was a spell that Yurika had used to control the snow and slow down the target. However, Yurika hadn't cast any incantation to activate that spell. What had cast that spell had been Yurika's new cane.

She can cast spells without any incantation whatsoever!?

Maki was left astonished. She had expected Yurika to use her own magic combined with the cane's, but she didn't think it would be instantaneous.

Unlike Koutarou and Kiriha, Yurika had a clear image of what magic was. Because of that, she didn't need to say anything to control the magic of the cane. That was the original trait of this cane.

“Flame Lance – Target Option – Auto Homing!”

While Maki's body was in midair, Yurika created a spear of fire. A second spell was cast immediately after the first, something that shouldn't be possible. It was a burning red spear that soared through the air towards Maki.

“I'll get hit!?”

Seeing the burning spear, Maki realized that she had no way of dodging it. She couldn't evade after being thrown in the air after all.

“Eei, in that case!!”

Maki pointed her cane upwards.

“Energy Release!!”

Maki released the magic infused in her cane and created a small explosion. Thanks to the shockwave of that explosion and gravity, Maki was able to slightly change the direction she was falling in.

The fire spear scratched her body and left a small scorch mark on her outfit. The fire spear continued flying and crashed into a pile of snow, blowing most of it away and melting the rest. The intense flame continued and after melting away all of the snow, it scorched the ground.

That was close! If I had been just a moment slower, I would have been defeated!

Secretly startled, Maki rolled across the snow before quickly standing up. She quickly readied her cane again, but she was still surprised on the inside.

To think she'd use magic like that…

Artifacts: the powerful magical tools said to be created by God, whose manufacturing method have been lost. Because of the enormous amounts magic power they contained, they were intended to be used for large-scale magic. However, no matter how powerful the artifact was, to cast such a spell an incantation was necessary. That was true for the majority of the artifacts that Maki knew off. However, the basis for Yurika's Encyclopedia was completely different. The spell’s effect was small, but there was no need to chant or focus. Therefore, magic could be cast at any time. On top of that, it could be used completely separate from the magic Yurika used.

Maki wasn't sure which was more dangerous: Yurika's larger magic which required incantations, or the weaker magic that could strike at any moment. However, she was well aware that both of them were highly dangerous.

The cane Satomi-san gave me isn't useless at all! This was made to fight against magicians!

Even Yurika herself was surprised about the same thing Maki was. She had first only thought of Encyclopedia as a tool she could use to camouflage herself. However, she had now finally realized the true worth of the cane. This cane was an artifact that operated outside of common sense for magicians. It was a cane that allowed her to attack at timings when her opponent had no chance to evade or block.

But I can't let my guard down! Maki is still better than me!

Yurika grabbed the cane with both hands and stared at Maki.

Yurika had more magic power than Maki thanks to her cane. However, when it came to using each spell, Maki had more experience. If she relied too much on the cane, she would suffer from a counter attack.

“Impressive, Nijino Yurika. That cane surprised me.”

“But you're still standing, Maki-chan. There's no point in just surprising you.”

Yurika wasn't showing any openings anymore.

Theia is always telling me that I'm too weak on the finish!

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Thanks to the games that Yurika had played against Koutarou, Theia and the others for over ten months, Yurika had gradually gotten better at using tactics and acting when push comes to shove. Sensing that, Maki clicked with her tongue on the inside.

You've gotten much better at acting when required, Nijino Yurika… It seems your wish has truly been fulfilled…

Yurika had always exuded the atmosphere of a mere apprentice, but now, Yurika showed none of that. Maki could feel that what Koutarou had said about Yurika becoming a splendid magician was true.

“Play time ends here, Nijino Yurika.”

Maki decided to switch gears. If Yurika was now strong enough to be properly called a member of Rainbow Heart, she had to be met with a reasonable method. That meant that Maki would use all of her power to defeat Yurika. In other words, Maki admitted that Yurika was a worthy opponent.

“Maki-chan!”

Yurika could also sense that the atmosphere around Maki had changed. Her seemingly overconfident expression had vanished and was replaced with a more serious one. Her look turned into a more desolate one, just like her indigo outfit.

“Nightwalker! Recall – Precast – Category Alpha!”

With her cane pointing towards Yurika, she loudly declared an incantation. In response to her voice, Maki's body was wrapped in a colorful light.

Maki's new cane, Nightwalker, came equipped with a special ability. A magician could prepare a number spells beforehand and store them. Nightwalker had the ability to increase that number. The two spells that Maki had used when talking with Koutarou had been the same.

And Maki now released more than ten spells all at once. All of them were spells that increased Maki's combat abilities, her physical strength, her toughness, her vision and thought speed; all kinds of spells activated and surrounded her. They greatly amplified her original power.

“The cane is!?”

But what attracted Yurika's attention the most wasn't Maki, but the change to her cane. The cane was enveloped in red and indigo light, and its silhouette had greatly changed. Its new shape was that of a large sword. The red magic that manipulated physical energy changed its shape into a sword, and indigo magic that controlled mental energy was surrounding it. It was a powerful magic sword that Maki had created.

“Here I come, Yurika!”

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Maki made a quick dash forward. Having her entire body covered in spells, Maki was far faster than before, and the distance between her and Yurika shrunk quickly.

“She's fast!?”

Despite Yurika aiming in on Maki with her cane, thanks to her speed, Maki could quickly shake off that aim. Despite Maki being slowed down by the snow, Yurika wasn't able to chase Maki with her eyes.

“I can do this!”

As Maki shortened the distance between her and Yurika, she felt she had a chance of winning. Even though Yurika could combine instant, weak magic with her own powerful, normal magic, she couldn't cast any spells on an opponent she couldn't target.

But to think I'd have to use this against someone like Yurika…

If Yurika could use spells at any timing, Maki would have to attack her using overwhelming speed and power. This was only made possible thanks to the many spells prepared beforehand, but she hadn't normally planned on using this against Yurika.

Instead of Yurika, it was for against Koutarou that she had prepared these spells. The white light that had formed into a sword had served as a hint, and this was her way of beating that. Koutarou's sword had the power to decompose magic, so using overwhelming speed to avoid that sword was the major premise. And since she lost in terms of magic power, a drawn out fight would result in her loss, so she wanted to finish it in a single hit. That had been Maki's plan to defeat Koutarou, but it seemed it was also effective against Yurika. She could defeat Yurika without giving her time to cast any spells.

“Maki-chan!?”

Yurika spotted Maki in her peripheral vision.

“Too slow!”

However, by that time, Maki was already swinging her sword. Yurika used her cane to cast the same spell as before and manipulated the snow below Maki's feet. However, Maki was far faster than before, and she instead kicked the snow and jumped without losing her balance.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

“Kyaaaa!!”

With no time to cast her own spell, Yurika was only able to use the cane in her hand to protect herself.

Maki's sword and Yurika's cane collided. Yurika was barely able to block Maki's swing. At the same time, she used the cane to cast another spell.

“You're too naive!”

However, despite the situation, Maki didn't separate from Yurika, and instead prepared for another attack.

“Oh no!?”

The reason for that was the magic infused in Maki's sword. It erases several seconds of memory from the person it hits. The spell infused in that sword passed through the cane and into Yurika.

“Huh…?”

The next moment, Yurika lost sight of Maki.

Amnesia!?

However, since she had been hit by the same spell before, Yurika wasn't too shaken up and instead began looking for Maki to counter attack.

“Haaayaaaaah!!”

However, Maki was quicker on the draw. She kicked her leg into Yurika's side. Having stopped thinking for a moment because of the memory manipulation, Yurika took the kick without being able to activate any spell.

Her kick had been strengthened by the increased speed and muscle power, and it was also covered with a spell that exploded on contact. Having been hit by that powerful kick, Yurika was sent flying and crashed down into the snow.

“Kahah.”

A painful voice escaped Yurika's lips. However, Yurika was somehow able to get back up. The snow had acted as a cushion and reduced the fall damage. If she hadn't landed on the snow, she probably would have been knocked out by that kick.

“Good job standing up, Nijino Yurika!! As expected of Rainbow Nana's successor!!”

Maki didn't ease up on her attacks. She readied her sword with both hands and charged towards Yurika.

I have to hurry, the limit is near!

Maki wasn't slowing down her attacks not only because she didn't want to let her guard down, but also for her own sake. The several spells she had prepared beforehand and activated all at once required a massive amount of magic power to keep active. In return for being able to overwhelm her opponent, she could only use the power for a short amount of time.

“H-How can I capture Maki-chan!?”

With Maki approaching her at high speed while changing position and her still recovering from her Maki’s kick, she had no way to aim at Maki.

“It's impossible for you! And now that I've reinforced myself, it's already too late!”

Maki could sense her victory. Yurika was being confused by Maki's movements and couldn't cast any spell. The next strike would take her down. Certain of that, she kept herself from getting too rash and started aiming for Yurika's openings.

What can I do!?

While Yurika was thinking, Maki decided to close the remaining distance in an instant. Sensing that, Yurika hurriedly shouted.

“Quick Cast – Anti-Magic Shield!!”

Maki's sword clashed with the shield that Yurika had created.

“Well done blocking it!”

Without trying to attack any more, Maki quickly distanced herself. That moment, the snow covering Maki's body was scattered across the air.

Huh…?

Seeing that, Yurika looked down at her own body. And she saw that snow was covering her own body as well. However, the amount was insignificant compared to Maki's.

“I see! I could do that!!”

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Having found her chance to win, Yurika's eyes started sparkling. While chanting her spell, she ordered Encyclopedia to cast a spell as well.

“I've got you!!”

To Maki, this was a golden opportunity. Since she was confident that Yurika would be unable to target her, she didn't care what spell Yurika was chanting. If anything, she was giving up on her defense.

However, Maki hadn't expected the two spells that Yurika had cast.

“Quick Cast – Acid Cloud – Modifier – Effective Area – Large!!”

Yurika had cast a spell that created a powerful acidic cloud. And the spell she had cast with her other cane also created clouds. The cloud was poisonous, and if inhaled, the lungs would absorb dangerous substances.

“What!?”

Maki was shocked. Yurika had cast the cloud with herself as the point of origin. So Maki who was in the middle of her attack jumped right into them.

“Th-This is!?”

The two clouds blocked her view, and Maki lost sight of Yurika. They began eroding her body.

“Guh, Kah, t-to think she would take use such a reckless tactic!! But with this, we'll both— no, wait!! So that's what she's planning!!”

Maki caught the drift of what Yurika's goal was.

As Maki moved a lot more, she would come into more contact with the acid. And since she was so active, her body consumed more oxygen, so she would need to breathe in more of the poisoned air, which meant that Maki would suffer more damage from this than Yurika. Also, Maki had lost sight of Yurika and could no longer attack.

This was the method of attack that Yurika had discovered from the snow covering Maki. If a lot of snow got stuck to her, it only made sense for her to come into more contact with the acid and poison. It was a simple but effective means of attack.

“Multiple Energy Bolt – Target Option – Spread!”

However, Yurika didn't stop her attacks there. Yurika fired magic arrows at the area she assumed Maki would be in.

“C-Curse you, Yurika!”

Maki hurriedly dodged. Although her speed had marginally dropped because of the acid and poison, she wasn't slow enough to take Yurika's attacks directly.

“Kuh, to think you'd get this strong!”

However, that was Yurika's goal. Since Maki needed to make large movements to dodge, she would suffer even more from the clouds. Her entire body was being covered in the acid and she was taking massive damage. And the slight amount of poison she had breathed in was beginning to spread throughout her body. There was no need for Yurika's attacks to hit; they only needed to make Maki move.

“Ugh!”

Maki ground her teeth from the pain and jumped with all of her strength, trying to escape from the clouds effective area. Staying in the clouds any longer would lead to her defeat.

I've been had! To think I can't defeat Yurika after all this!

Ski Resort and Signature Move

Maki twisted her body after she jumped out from the clouds.

It would be hard to continue the fight when suffering damage from the acid and poison, not to mention that she had too little remaining magic power to switch things up to a long distance fight. Either way, she wasn't in a situation where she could hope for victory anymore.

However, it won't go like this next time, Nijino Yurika!

Maki retreated with a strong sense of humiliation. If she took her time to prepare her fight against Yurika, she was sure she could win.

“…She ran off?”

Yurika undid her spells after the attacks stopped coming and she could sense that Maki was moving away. The clouds dispersed and Yurika appeared from their center.

“No, she probably didn't… Maki-chan probably let me go because she wanted to avoid mutual destruction…”

Yurika leaned against her cane and let out a sigh of relief. She didn't think that she had won against Maki. In fact, Yurika herself had also taken a beating from the acid and poison. If the fighting had continued on like that, it wasn't hard to imagine both of them collapsing from serious damage, regardless of who won.

“Maki-chan is really strong…”

After letting out another sigh of relief, Yurika began using healing magic to treat her body.

If she hadn't noticed that Maki had been covered in more snow than her, she definitely would have lost. Since she barely managed to avoid her loss, she was deeply relieved.

But, but…

But at this time, Yurika had a doubt. It was a major doubt that could shake Yurika's very reason for existing.

“But, but, should a magical girl of love and courage really use acid and poison…?”

The magical girl of love and courage ☆ Rainbow Yurika, her special abilities are clouds of acid and poison.

“If anything, isn't Maki-chan who uses a sword more magical girl-like…?

Having gotten a second transformation stage and a power up, Yurika still felt like she had lost something important as a magical girl.

Pursuit and Conditions for a Couple

Part 1

Wednesday, February 3

An arcade existed within the hotel at the ski resort, however, the game machines there were all antique machines over a decade old, so a lot of the guests just passed by without entering.

“Come on, power up, power up.”

“You're taking it now!?”

The only exceptions were enthusiasts like Koutarou and Theia who loved old games. Because of that, Koutarou, Theia and Ruth could be found in the arcade. The three of them had found this place after dinner and were now amusing themselves. The ones playing right now were Koutarou and Theia, with Ruth watching over them from behind.

“See what happened. It was a mistake getting the power up at that timing.”

“As if you could take it in the middle of that rain of bullets!”

“I won't listen to your excuses. More importantly, hurry up and continue. A knight shouldn’t be letting me fight on my own.”

Koutarou had gotten a game over, but Theia was still playing. She controlled a small fighter in the center of the screen and fought the invaders coming from space.

“…Well anyways, it's hard not to laugh, seeing you fight invaders.”

“I couldn't laugh even if I wanted to when I'm too busy fighting on my own. Hurry up and continue.”

“Wait a second, I need to get some more change.”

“Do not worry, I've already gotten you some.”

Ruth presented her hands in front of Koutarou who had just stood up. In her hands were a large amount of coins.

“Thank you. I'll pay you back later.”

“No, please use them freely.”

“I can't just—”

“Hurry, Koutarou! I'm about to lose!”

“Okay, okay.”

Koutarou put the coins he got from Ruth into the machine and continued playing the game next to Theia. As he did, Koutarou's blue fighter appeared next to Theia's pink fighter. The two of them worked together to defeat the invaders.

After a while, the two of them finally reached the last boss of the game.

“Koutarou, it's time for a union attack!”

“I got it, I'll do the rapid fire! You control the ship!”

“Leave it to me! Just believe in me and keep firing!”

“Understood!”

Through their skillful combination, they damaged the enemy's huge battleship, little by little. Koutarou focused on firing and endlessly pressed the button as fast as he could, while Theia

dexterously evaded the enemy's attacks. It was a splendid fight that had made use of their respective good points.

Eventually, their teamwork paid off and the enemy's giant battleship exploded.

“Ooh!?”

“Did we do it!?”

The screen changed into a credit roll, displaying the names of everyone responsible for the game. And at the end was a thanks to the players who had reached the end.

“We did it Theia, we beat it!”

“Ooooooh, it's our victory!”

While glancing at the credits rolling by, Koutarou and Theia began cheering loudly. They would point at the screen and rejoice and then claim it was all thanks to them. Meanwhile, Ruth was watching over the two with a smile.

“Alright, I'll give you a reward for your contributions to the royal families.”

“A reward?”

“Yes. I'll buy you a soda. Is cola fine as always?”

“Yeah. Aren't you feeling generous today?”

“It's the duty of royalty to praise their vassals when they deserve it.”

“Who are you calling a vassal?”

“You of course. Even if you aren't right now, you will be eventually!”

Still excited, Theia stood up and began running towards the vending machine, not giving Koutarou any time to object.

“I will be eventually, huh…”

She hadn't changed a bit since they first met. Theia was coercive and spoke as if she was looking down on him. In the past, Koutarou wouldn’t even think of obeying her; however, it was different as of late. Since he knew the reason for why Theia wanted to make him her vassal, his will to resist was almost completely gone.

But still… what is this…

Today, Koutarou had been feeling that something was off ever since they got to the ski resort. Theia looked like she had been worrying about something these past few days. But when they reached the ski resort, she returned to her usual self.

It's the normal Theia but… it's, like…?

It seemed to be the usual Theia. Her words and actions were the same as always, but Koutarou felt like something was different somehow. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, and it left him puzzled.

“Is something the matter, Satomi-sama?”

Noticing Koutarou's behavior, Ruth called out to him.

“It's not something with me… Did something happen to Theia?”

Koutarou honestly told Ruth about his doubts. He felt that Ruth would have noticed the change and she would know the reason why.

“…Why would you think that, Satomi-sama?"

However Ruth responded to Koutarou's question with another. And for some reason, she started smiling.

It seems like something definitely happened…

Seeing Ruth's smile, Koutarou quickly gathered his thoughts.

“How do I put this… she looks the same as always, but… her presence? I just felt like that is somewhat off from normal…”

Theia was currently putting coins into the vending machine. She looked the way she always did. However, something was different. Koutarou struggled to put that into words, but it was a very strong sense of something being out of place.

“Is it displeasing?”

“No. It's a mild feeling, but it's not displeasing.”

Ruth nodded with a satisfied expression on her face after hearing Koutarou's answer and her smile got slightly larger.

“I see… Satomi-sama, her highness had a personal worry for a while. After resolving that, it seems like her frame of mind has changed slightly as well.”

“Worry… then it's not like some major event happened?”

“Yes. Nothing has happened. Of course, it may have been a major event for her highness.”

“I see. So that's why…”

Koutarou looked at Theia. And as if sensing that he was looking at her, Theia turned towards him.

“Koutarou. There's a cola here with 0 calories, and one that looks kind of unhealthy. Which one do you want?”

“I'll leave it up to you.”

“Alright, then leave it to me.”

Leaving behind a smile, Theia turned back towards the vending machine and put coins in. She then returned holding three plastic bottles.

“Here, Ruth. They didn't have any tea that wasn't sweet, so I got you Japanese tea.”

“Thank you, your highness.”

Theia passed a bottle to Ruth. Although they hadn't exchanged any words, Theia hadn't forgotten about Ruth.

But if Theia is different, then Ruth-san is slightly different too…

It was rare to see Ruth let Theia go buy drinks. It was a small change, not just in Theia, but in Ruth as well. While Koutarou was thinking about that, a plastic bottle appeared in front of him.

“Koutarou, this is for you.”

“Ah, thanks.”

She gave him a cola with 0 calories and no sugar in it.

“Since it's a school trip and since it’s your reward, I was thinking of buying you the unhealthy version, but…”

Koutarou preferred the unhealthy cola with sugar. He felt that the aftertaste for the 0 calorie cola was different.

“You'll eventually become someone who stands above others. So I bought this one instead, since you should worry a little more about your health like me.”

Theia had gotten the same soda as Koutarou.

“Stand above others…”

Theia had gotten the 0 calorie cola as she worried for Koutarou, or her future vassal's body.

“Are you dissatisfied?”

Theia removed the cap from her bottle and smiled at Koutarou.

“Ah…”

Koutarou couldn't answer right away. He struggled with his feelings, he was both dissatisfied and not. But before he could answer, Ruth opened her mouth.

“I am dissatisfied. Your highness, why are you only leaving me out?”

“Ruth, you don't like cola, right?”

“If your highness bought it, I would have wanted the same thing.”

“Ah fine, just wait! I'll go buy one!”

Theia pushed her bottle to Ruth and returned to the vending machine. Koutarou had been staring at the two, but he eventually looked down on his own bottle and opened it.

I feel like it doesn't even matter anymore…

Regardless of what changes had happened to Theia or Ruth, there was no need to worry. Koutarou felt certain of that after seeing their carefree discussion.

“Here, this is yours.”

“Thank you, your highness. I'll do my best to drink it.”

“I feel like something's very wrong, but… oh well.”

While listening to their discussion, Koutarou put the bottle in his mouth. The chilled cola felt great as it passed through his parched throat.

“By the way, what are we going to do with this Japanese tea?”

“Since her highness bought it for me, I'll drink it later.”

After Koutarou had drunk most of his cola, he spotted Yurika passing by the entrance to the arcade as he casually looked around.

“…Where is she going at this hour?”

“What's wrong, Koutarou?”

“Well, it looks like Yurika is heading outside.”

Koutarou was only able to see Yurika for a few seconds from his position, but he saw her wearing thick outdoor clothes. Since the heating in the hotel was working, not even Yurika who hated the cold would wear that much clothing. So Yurika wearing that must have meant that she was planning on going outside.

“At this hour?”

Ruth looked up at the clock in the arcade. The time was now past 9:30, it was almost time for lights out.

“That's strange… I'll go check on her.”

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Just the fact that Yurika who hated the cold was going outside was strange. Sensing that something was about to happen, Koutarou finished off his cola and headed towards the arcade's exit.

“Ruth, we're going too.”

“Yes, your highness.”

Theia and Ruth followed suit and the three of them chased after Yurika.

Part 2

Koutarou and the others caught up to Yurika as she got off the stairs leading from the second to the first floor.

“Wait up, Yurika, where are you headed this late?”

“Satomi-san!?”

Yurika eyes opened wide as she was suddenly stopped.

“W-Where, well I'm not going anywhere.”

“Don't lie. Wearing clothes like that is like broadcasting that you're planning on sneaking outside.”

“Auuu.”

Yurika wearing thick clothing, avoiding the elevators and opting to instead travel in the less trafficked areas of the hotel meant that she was planning on sneaking out of the hotel, and for a rather long period of time at that. If she was just heading out to pick up something she had dropped from a window, there would have been no need to sneak around.

“Yurika-sama, where are you heading?”

“Based on your answer we might even help you. Just tell us.”

“U-Uhm… that's…”

Questioned by Ruth and Theia, Yurika was at a loss for an answer. And after some heavy thinking she decided to tell them only what she could.

“A-Actually, Maki-chan is gone.”

“Aika-san is?”

“Yes. So I was going to quietly search for her…”

After healing the wounds she got from her battle, Yurika had begun searching for Maki's whereabouts. Since she knew that Maki was planning something, she couldn't just leave her be.

But she couldn't find Maki anywhere by the ski slopes. And even after the skiing hours were over, Maki hadn't returned to the hotel. So Yurika determined that Maki was outside of the hotel and had decided to go look for her.

“Just you alone?”

“Y-Yes. It would be problematic if it turned into a big deal, so going alone is…”

If their classmates or teachers found out about Maki's absence, there would be a great fuss. And if Yurika was alone, she’d be free to use magic to look for Maki. There was also the chance that the two would end up fighting again, so Yurika going out on her own was the correct decision for various reasons.

Aaauu. What should I do? Satomi-san will get angry again~.

However, Yurika couldn't say these things. Since this was Koutarou, he would definitely worry about her going out on her own. He wasn't the kind of guy who would overlook a girl walking around the mountain at night by herself. Fearing that Koutarou's fist and angry voice would send her flying away, Yurika closed her eyes tightly.

“I see, so that's how it is. Good idea, Yurika.”

“…E-Eh?”

However, no matter how long she waited, neither a fist nor angry voice came flying. She cautiously opened one of her eyes and found Koutarou nodding and smiling.

“In this situation, you're the perfect fit.”

“S-Satomi-san?”

Yurika was greatly surprised by Koutarou's unusual reaction.

Why!?

Her surprise at the time was far from normal and she began doubting her eyes and ears.

“What do you mean? There's no way that Yurika would find Maki if she entered the mountains on her own.”

Theia had the same doubts as Yurika, and asked in her place. Ruth who was behind her had a worried look on her face as she felt the same way.

“Did you forget? Right now, Yurika can use real magic. So she would definitely find Aika-san before the police or a search party.”

“You're right!!”

Theia's eyes lit up as she understood Koutarou's reasoning.

Yurika had the cane that Koutarou had brought home. If she used its power, she would be able to resolve the situation before it got serious. However, because of that, Yurika had to move on her own. If her classmates or teachers followed her, she wouldn't be able to use her magic.

“Yurika, I would like to apologize for my rude remark. Your judgment was correct.”

“I am very sorry, Yurika-sama.”

“N-No, you don't really have to apologize…”

Theia and Ruth apologized, making Yurika feel grateful instead.

H-Huh!? S-Something's strange!! What happened to them!?

The situation developed in a way completely different from anything before. Just a few days ago, nobody respected Yurika's behavior, but now all three of them showed a completely opposite reaction. Because of that, Yurika just got more confused.

“But, Yurika.”

Koutarou's expression turned more serious.

Auu, he really is going to get angry.

Yurika instinctively shut her eyes. She would be put down after being praised. It was something that had happened several times in the past.

“I'll have to subtract points for not consulting with us first. Even if you can use magic, going into the mountain at night alone is dangerous. Besides, you can use your magic in front of us.”

Koutarou put his large hand on top of Yurika's head.

“…Eh?”

Yurika looked up and opened her eyes. What she saw was Koutarou still smiling at her.

H-He's really not, angry…?

If she had been shouted at or hit, her surprise would be lesser. But Yurika completely spaced out from the completely unexpected development.

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“Alright, I understand the situation.”

“S-Satomi-san?”

In contrast to Koutarou, Yurika wasn't following the situation at all.

“Yurika, I'll come with you. Wait for me here while I just go get changed.”

“O-Okay…”

Because of that, Yurika ended up just going along with it.

“Koutarou, I'll come with you.”

“No, that would be bad.”

“Why?”

“With me, Yurika and Aika-san gone, that would mean three people from class 1A are missing. Any more than that and even the teachers would notice.”

“T-That's true…”

“Your highness, I believe it would be wise if we remain here and keep everyone's absence a secret.”

“I understand. But call me right away if things get dangerous.”

“Yeah! Anyways, I'll go change! Yurika, don't run off on your own!”

“O-Okay!”

Leaving Yurika and the others behind, Koutarou rushed up the stairs.

Satomi-san praised me… and now he's going to help me…

Looking at his back, Yurika still couldn't understand why this had happened. She couldn't understand, but she could feel that the atmosphere around her was starting to change.

What is, this, blissful feeling…

Koutarou still thought of Yurika as a normal girl, but despite that, he had become aware that she could now use magic.

And why is my heart throbbing so hard…?

Yurika was able to accomplish her duty as a magical girl while being treated as a normal girl. What's more, she was even getting help and being praised.

There was nothing more joyful than that for Yurika, and it seemed that her throbbing heart wasn't settling down anytime soon.

Not long after leaving the hotel, Yurika stripped off all of her thick clothing and was wearing her magical girl outfit. She would normally complain how cold it was in the middle of a mountain at night in light clothing, but this time, Yurika didn't feel the cold. Instead, one could observe that her eyes were sparkling.

“Satomi-san, Satomi-san, look, I'll cast the next spell!”

“I said that's enough.”

“You don't have to be so modest, this next one is amazing♪”

“You said the same thing about the last one.”

“Just look! Eee~~ii!”

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Yurika held Encyclopedia above her head with both hands while smiling. When she did, red and yellow light shot out from the cane at the same time and enveloped Koutarou and Yurika.

“O-Oh? I'm floating!”

“It's amazing, right? It's supposedly called Limited Levitation♪”

The twos legs floated slightly above the ground. It was almost like there was an invisible board five centimeters from the ground and they were walking on top of it.

“It doesn't seem to have enough power to fly, but when used in places like this where the footing is so poor, it becomes easier to walk.”

“Oh, that's quite impressive…”

Thanks to the spell, Koutarou and Yurika's walking speed increased considerably. Their steps became lighter and their feet no longer sank into the snow.

“Alright, then I'll cast the next spell♪”

“Yurika, that's enough. It would be problematic if we run out of magic power when we need it, right?”

Koutarou stopped Yurika as she raised her cane overhead again.

Since the two had left the hotel, Yurika had cast about ten spells. Yurika had been using spells that she believed would be useful for travelling in the mountain at night such as levitation, light, protection against the cold, night vision and more.

Because of that, even though Koutarou knew that the cane had been created to use weak magic, he couldn't help but worry about the remaining magic power.

“It'll be fine. This cane hasn't lost a bit of its power even after using this many spells.”

“I hope so…”

Since Yurika understood how the cane worked better than Koutarou, she knew his worries were unnecessary. And Yurika wasn't just using magic for no reason. She was using a lot of lesser spells to preserve their stamina and preparing for her confrontation with Maki. Also, by repeatedly casting spells, Koutarou would eventually lower his guard against her spells, making it easier to put him to sleep before they encountered Maki. This way, she could effectively keep him out of the fight.

That was half of the reason for why she was using so many spells. The other half was that she was unable to contain her joy.

“Satomi-san, Satomi-san, what kind of spell should I use next!?”

“Yurika, don't get too carried away. It's dangerous so look forward when you're walking.”

“It's fine♪ Even I will— Ouf.”

At that moment, Yurika crashed into a tree by the side of the snow-covered road.

When she did, the snow that had piled up on the branches poured down on Yurika.

“That’s just what I warned you about. Here, give me your hand.”

“S-Sorry.”

Koutarou reached out his hand to Yurika, who was sitting down covered in snow. She frowned, her face already starting to turn red from the crash with tree. She grabbed Koutarou's hand and stood up. She then began to embarrassingly wipe the snow off her body.

“Hey, Yurika.”

“…What?”

“About your next spell, make it one to fix your face or dry your clothes.”

“Okay, I will…”

Yurika had become able to freely use magic in front of Koutarou and the others, but it seemed like Yurika and Koutarou's relationship would still remain unchanged.

Part 3

Maki had begun tracking down the demon on the peak of the mountain as soon as she had healed the damage she had taken from her fight against Yurika.

However, since her detection magic wasn't as good as Dark Green who specialized in fortune telling, she had lost track of the demon. After that, she had been aimlessly walking around the peak. But just a moment ago, she had managed to pick up its track once more.

“There's no mistaking it… it's just past here…”

Maki was wearing her magical girl outfit. She was far too lightly dressed to be walking around a snowy mountain, but the cold wasn't affecting her at all. Like Yurika, she was using several spells to protect herself from the cold. Of course, her steps were also light.

“There… Is it in that cave…?”

There was a cave in the direction Maki was headed. The entrance of the cave was about three meters large. It was more than large enough for a person to pass through.

The detection spell that Maki was using was telling her that there was a large magic power deep inside the cave. Maki assumed that the demon she was after had made the cave its lair.

“…This certainly is an impressive amount of magic power.”

As Maki stood at the entrance of the cave, even without using her detection magic, she could sense a large amount of magic power, enough to give her goose bumps. Its magic power was massive, and if she was able to turn it over to her side, it should be a useful tool in a battle. However, she could feel something that bothered her.

“…I wonder what this feeling is…”

Maki excelled at magic that manipulated the mind, she was a magician that used indigo magic. Because of that, she was able to notice feelings that were mixed in with the powerful magic power.

“Is this… fear, perhaps…?”

Maki was able to detect a strong sense of fear from what she assumed was the master of this cave. That powerful feeling created a strong wave in the magic power leaking out.

“Sense Emotion, Mana Shield, Resist Magic…”

Maki sensed something ominous about the fear coming from deep inside the cave and activated several spells. The existence within the cave wasn't as powerful as Maki, but it was dangerous enough to persuade her from going in defenseless. A minimal amount of preparation was necessary.

“Now then, just what lies in wait inside?”

Relying on the light created from her cane, she carefully entered the cave. The cave continued straight forward in a slight curve. Because of that, there was no need to fear getting lost.

The heels of Maki's shoes clacked as they hit the cave floor and made loud noises. The walls and floor of the cave were covered in ice. Because of that, Maki's steps echoed into the very depths of the cave.

“It seems like the master of this cave can manipulate ice…”

Trace amounts of magical power was embedded into the ice. There seemed to be no mistake that the master of the cave had created it. As Maki continued deeper into the cave, she activated another spell to defend herself against the ice.

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“Guh-Guuuuuuuu…”

After walking several dozen meters into the cave, a beast like groan could be heard. The voice echoed and sounded much louder than it actually was. The echoing powerful voice combined with the powerful magic power greatly shook Maki's delicate body.

“Looks like it's just up ahead.”

A normal animal or person probably would have run off after hearing that groan. However, Maki smiled instead, and picked up her pace. Intimidation of this level didn't work on Maki.

“Found it!”

Pressing on several dozen meters after hearing the groan, she reached a large open area that seemed to reach at least 20 meters in all directions. Maki found the demon in the deepest part of the open area.

Its body was about two meters in height and covered in white hair. It stood up on two legs like a human, but its silhouette was closer to a beast than man. It might have been similar to a lion being forced to stand upright. What stood out the most were the wings on its back and its head. They both had a shape that reminded Maki of a falcon or eagle.

It was a white behemoth standing on two legs, with the head and wings of a bird of prey. That was the master of this cave, a demon. It certainly reminded one of a devil or something from legends.

Based on its powerful looking body and the vast magic power it held, Maki believed it would be a quite powerful demon.

“Y-Yu, wy di yu com her!! Do yu com her to kil me!?”

But as the demon looked at Maki, it started to back away. It was rare for a powerful demon to back off even in the face of a strong enemy. Maki had encountered many powerful demons before, but this was the first time she had seen this kind of reaction.

It sounds like it's speaking ancient Folsarian…

Maki tilted her head in confusion from the demon's reaction and began speaking to it in the same language it had used. The language it was using was something that a high ranking magician like Maki learned and used daily.

“Calm down. I only came here to make a deal with you. If possible, I want to contract you as a familiar.”

Maki spoke the true reason for why she had come.

“Yur lyng!”

However, the demon rejected her immediately. And while glaring at Maki he began to intimidate her.

“Guuuuuooooooo!!”

“Wait! I really did come here to contract you as—”

“Silen! I kan tel tha yu ar lyng! Vadra ar komin her! Yu ar Vadras aly riht!?”

“Vadra…?”

The demon spoke a word that Maki didn't recognize. Based on the flow of speech, it seemed to be a proper noun, but since the demon's throat hadn't been made to speak human language, Maki couldn't understand what he meant.

“What is Vadra? What are you so scared of?”

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The reason for the demon's fear seemed to be that word. As Maki approached the demon, she could see that it was horribly frightened. If she didn't do something about this fear, Maki wouldn't be able to make the demon her familiar, so she wanted to know what Vadra was.

“Yu kan no fol me! I kan smel Vadra on yu! Yur rol is to stal me is it no!?”

“Vadra's smell? Stall you?”

“Her! Vadra is her! He almos her! I wil be kiled! He wil kil me wit Signaltin!! I hav to kil tis oen an run!!”

However, Maki wasn't able to find out what the demon meant. Without answering her question, the demon, frightened and frenzied, attacked her.

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Part 4

Koutarou and Yurika reached the cave in question several minutes after Maki had entered.

Yurika believed that Maki was doing something related to magic on the mountain, so instead of blindly searching, she started looking for magic power present on the mountain. As a result, she detected the same thing Maki was looking for and reached this cave.

“In here?”

“It looks like it. Maki-chan is probably in here.”

Koutarou stared into the cave with curiosity. While looking at Koutarou from behind, Yurika began thinking that it was about time to put him to sleep.

Maki might be inside the cave. Even if she wasn't, something related to magic definitely was. Since she wanted Koutarou to believe that they were looking for Maki who had gone missing, she felt it was best if she put him to sleep before he entered the cave, and then hide him somewhere safe.

Having decided that, Yurika pointed her cane at Koutarou.

“Satomi-san, since it's dark inside, I'll cast some more light magic.”

“Yeah, please do.”

Having had several spells cast on him until now, he didn't question Yurika approaching him from behind with her cane.

I feel kind of bad for tricking him, but… this is also for Satomi-san's sake…

She pointed the cane at Koutarou and instead of using the cane's magic, she began chanting a spell to use her own. Since it was a spell that affected the mind, she didn't readily trust the tool, and instead she used her own magic that she had proper control over.

What if I let him have a nice dream? Something like Satomi-san, me and Sakuraba-senpai going out to play somewhere…

With Yurika mixing in her own wishes and mischief, she began casting her spell.

“Deep Sleep – Combined – Control Dream – Modifier – Effective Time – Twice.”

The spell that put one to sleep and the spell that controlled dreams combined into one indigo light and surrounded Koutarou.

“Ooh?”

Koutarou had a mysterious look on his face as he looked at the indigo light surrounding him. However, that was for just a moment. The effects of the spell quickly took effect and he lost his consciousness. Since Koutarou didn’t resist her spell, the effect had been quick to manifest.

“Good night, Satomi-san.”

Yurika smiled at Koutarou and held his body so he wouldn't collapse.

“Wawa!?”

Koutarou's body was heavier than she had expected, but she was somehow able to support him.

“Phew… all that's left is to hide him somewhere, he should be fine if I put up a ward.”

Yurika looked around the area and spotted a large rock near the cave. She believed she could hide Koutarou's large body in the shadow of the rock.

However, something happened before she could carry his body there.

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It was a sound that could be mistaken for a cannon. At the same time, a large amount of snow came blowing out from the entrance of the cave right in front of Yurika. She spotted Maki amongst the snow being blown out.

“Kyaaa!? Wait, M-Maki-chan!?”

“Nijino Yurika!?”

For the short instant they passed each other, Yurika and Maki's glances crossed. Maki then continued flying on and crashed into the snow. Still holding Koutarou, Yurika just blankly stared.

“Guuuuuuooooooo!!”

The next moment, the white demon came out of the cave, chasing after Maki. The demon looked like it was about to attack Maki, but the moment he noticed Yurika, he stopped moving while in the air.

“Gaaaaaaa, Vadra, Vadraaaaa!”

The demon then flapped its wings and came charging at Yurika.

“Kil! Kil! Vadra, Vadra!!”

Its hands shone red for an instant before both its arms were surrounded by a white snowstorm. That was the ice magic this demon used.

“Oh no!!”

Noticing that the demon was targeting her and Koutarou, she began chanting a spell.

“Quick Cast – Greater Protection!!”

That spell was the strongest defensive spell that she could use. The yellow light surrounded her and Koutarou.

“Dieeee!!”

The demon attacked with its magic. The white snowstorm left its arms and surrounded Yurika and Koutarou.

“Kyaaaa!!”

Surrounded by snow, Yurika let out a scream. As the snowstorm wrapped around Yurika, its density quickly changed and became a pillar of ice. Within a few seconds, Yurika had been frozen into a giant ice pillar.

Meanwhile, Koutarou who was asleep only got some ice on him. This was thanks to her defensive spell and the fact that she had pushed him away before the snowstorm hit. He was protected by a yellow light and had rolled several meters away from Yurika.

“Y-Yurika…”

Maki raised her body up and looked at the pillar of ice trapping Yurika. She had been completely frozen with her eyes wide open. Maki wasn't even sure if Yurika was alive or not. With the sudden arrival and crisis of her rival, Maki had forgotten about the existence of the white demon for an instant.

“Die, Dieeee! Vadra! Dieeeee!”

But even if she hadn't forgotten, she probably couldn't have avoided its next attack. The next attack the frenzied white demon conjured up was a huge avalanche.

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Part 5

Koutarou and Yurika had left the hotel at around 9:30. An hour and a half had passed and it was almost time for the lights to go out in the hotel. Because of that, the number of people in the lobby had greatly decreased.

Theia entered the lobby as the noise there began to die down. She was getting worried for Koutarou and the others who hadn't come back yet, and she naturally found herself walking towards the lobby.

Where is Koutarou…?

Theia looked around for Koutarou. If he was coming back, he would contact them beforehand. So even if Theia was looking for Koutarou now, there was no way she would find him. She was well aware of that herself.

I'm such a fool… hm?

Instead of Koutarou, Theia found a familiar girl. She smiled slightly and approached the girl.

“Sanae.”

The girl in the lobby was Sanae. She was sitting on a sofa and staring at the automatic door at the entrance.

“Huh? What is it, Theia?”

Since Sanae was so focused on watching the door, she didn't notice Theia until she had called out her name. Because of that, she had been slightly surprised by the sudden voice.

“It's nothing. I just naturally found myself walking here.”

Theia sat down next to Sanae. She felt like being here and talking with Sanae for a while.

“Hmph. I'm waiting for Koutarou to come back.”

Sanae pouted and pointed at the automatic door. Despite waiting for Koutarou, Sanae seemed to be in a bad mood.

“Once he gets back I'll complain to him.”

“Why?”

“Because he didn't bring me with him for something so interesting.”

While expressing her dissatisfaction, Sanae pointed at the door in a rhythmical fashion. Koutarou and Yurika had left when Sanae was in the hot springs with Kiriha. Sanae didn't like that and was angry that Koutarou had left her behind.

“Theia, you should say something too.”

“Me?”

“Yeah. Aren't there some things you'd like to tell him too?”

“Well I do, but…”

Theia smiled wryly. There were indeed some things she wanted to tell Koutarou, but the contents of those were different from what Sanae had meant.

No, on the grand scale of things, they might be the same…

In the end, the reason for Theia and Sanae being in the lobby was the same.

“You take those repressed feelings and use your maiden spirit and guts to—”

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The entrance door opened. Sanae and Theia both looked towards it at the same time and their conversation stopped.

“We finally got here, papa.”

“It's already late night… geez.”

“I'll check us in right away. Just wait a moment.”

A young couple with a child entered the hotel. They seemed to be guests and they approached the receptionist.

What… they're just guests…

Theia sadly dropped her shoulders. They weren't the people that Theia and Sanae had hoped to see.

“Sanae?”

“…”

Theia quickly looked back at Sanae, but Sanae didn't do the same. Instead, she followed the family of three with her eyes. The combination of a young couple and a small child, most likely theirs, was something that she was curious about.

“…”

“What is it, Sanae.”

“Theia… s-sorry, what were we talking about?”

In the end, Sanae was only able to focus on Theia after the family of three had entered the elevator and vanished.

“That doesn't matter. More importantly, what is it? Was there something wrong with that family?”

“No. They just reminded me a little of papa and mama.”

Strictly speaking, Sanae wasn't interested in the three people. Instead, she was remembering her own parents. Because of that, Sanae's normally cheerful smile had gotten fainter.

“Right. That's what happened to you… sorry for asking.”

“It's fine. Besides, that's not all.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Hm… when I saw those three I was thinking-”

Sanae looked away from Theia and onto the floor of the lobby. At the same time, her smile faded even further. She was still smiling, but it was a horribly sad smile.

“I can't get married nor have children… so I was envious of that mom…”

As a ghost, Sanae couldn't marry nor have children. She would never be able to start her own family.

“Chi…ldren…?”

That one word from Sanae pierced through Theia's heart.

That's right… I, I'm the same as Sanae…

She was greatly shocked; it was almost as if her whole world had broken apart.

“Theia? What's wrong? Your face is pale.”

Sanae's worried voice didn't reach Theia's ears. The sudden massive despair pulled Theia down into a dark place.

I'm an alien…!! No matter how much I love him and wish for it, I can't provide Koutarou with a new family…!!

Based on her efforts, Theia might be able to make Koutarou her vassal. It might even be possible for them to become lovers. If that happened, marriage wasn't out of the question.

But that was it. The path ended there for an alien like Theia.

Humans on Earth and Forthorthe looked very similar, but in reality they had developed in different ecosystems and they were completely different creatures. Even for closely related species, a single generation was roughly the limit. So when it came to two completely different species, the chances were close to none.

What… was I so elated for… as an alien, I am the same as a talking doll to Koutarou…

The major principle of life was tying things to a new generation. However, Theia couldn't do that. Theia and Koutarou couldn't even become a normal couple.

When she noticed that, Theia's heart began to freeze. It was as if her resolution to believe in Koutarou and the warm feelings that had come from that had all frozen.

Escaping From the Dungeon

Part 1

'**Wednesday, February 3**

The hypnosis Yurika had used to put Koutarou to sleep was powerful, but it wasn't powerful enough to last for two powerful attacks. Because of that, Koutarou woke up when he was hit by the avalanche.

“Dowaaaaaaa!? What is this!?”

Koutarou couldn't remember anything from the point where Yurika had cast a spell on him. Waking up in the middle of an avalanche like that would make anyone panic.

Swept away by the snow, Koutarou didn't stop sliding for at least 100 meters down the slope. Since he had defensive spells cast on him by Yurika, he hadn't suffered any damage or been buried, he had only been swept away.

“I-It's stopped!?”

Koutarou raised his body using his hand and began thinking.

Did the avalanche happen when Yurika was about to recast her spell?

Since he hadn't seen the essential part, Koutarou could only interpret the situation as such.

“That's right, where's Yurika!?”

If he had been caught in the avalanche, Yurika should have been too. Koutarou stood up and looked around the area for Yurika. When he did, he finally noticed his surroundings.

He was in the woods down the slope. Since the avalanche had crashed into the woods, it lost speed and didn't get out of control.

“There!! Yurika!!”

Between the forest and snow, Koutarou spotted two things. The first was the cane, Encyclopedia, that he had given to Yurika. The second was the head of a person who had been caught in the avalanche. Based on the situation, Koutarou assumed that it was Yurika.

“Just wait, I'll come save you right now!”

Koutarou quickly began running. He picked up the cane along the way and ran up to the head he believed was Yurika's.

“Good thing this cane was here!”

Koutarou used the cane as a shovel and began digging. Responding to Koutarou's will, the cane began functioning as a shovel. Thanks to that, he was able to dig up the buried individual before long.

“This isn't Yurika!?”

However, that individual wasn't Yurika. Instead, it was the person they had gone out to look for, Aika Maki. She had lost her consciousness, and Koutarou picked her up.

“Aika-san!? Why is Aika-san here!? No, more importantly, Aika-san! Aika-san!!”

Koutarou shook Maki's body in an attempt to wake her up.

“Guuu!!”

As he did, Maki raised a painful voice and her face warped. Seeing that, Koutarou hurriedly stopped shaking her.

Escaping From the Dungeon

“What's wrong, Aika-san— Ah…”

At that moment, Koutarou noticed that his hand was covered in blood. It wasn't his own blood, but Maki's.

“Aika-san, you're injured…”

She seemed to have hurt herself when she was swept away by the avalanche as she had a large wound in her side. Lots of blood was pouring out from there and created a red pool on the snow. It was obvious that her life was in danger if she was left like this.

“Alright, I'll contact Theia and the others and have them come help as soon as possible.”

As he spoke his thoughts out loud, Koutarou decided to use the bracelet he had gotten from Clan to contact Theia and the others.

“Gooooooooaaaaaaaaa!!”

“What!?”

However, just before Koutarou's finger touched the bracelet, a beast like roar echoed throughout his surroundings. He looked up in the direction of the roar; at the top of the slope by the cave entrance, he saw a roaring white demon and Yurika, trapped in a pillar of ice.

“Kil, Vadra kil, com ot!! I now yu ar stil aliv!!”

“What is that!? And what happened to Yurika!?”

Koutarou hurriedly focused on his own eyes. As he did, he could see a white aura overlapping Yurika inside the pillar of ice. If she had been dead, there wouldn't be an aura there. Although she had been completely frozen and it looked fatal, Yurika was still alive.

“Did that monster do that to Yurika!? But, if I hurry she can still be saved!!”

In an attempt to save Yurika, Koutarou was about to take action.

“Uuuh.”

However, Maki's groan made Koutarou stop.

W-Who do I save first!?

Koutarou looked back and forth at Maki and Yurika. It was a hard choice for him to decide who to help first.

“Sorry, Yurika! I'll come save you as fast as possible! Just wait!”

Finally, Koutarou decided on starting with Maki. Her aura was growing weaker faster than Yurika's, and she was still hemorrhaging. At this rate, Maki would definitely die and Koutarou couldn't just let that happen.

The girl known as Aika Maki was born in the slums of Folsaria. However, Maki couldn't remember the name of that city. That was because she had been sold off as a slave by her own parents before she gained awareness of her surroundings.

But it might have been fortunate for everyone involved that Maki didn't remember the name of that city. If she had, the city most definitely would have been destroyed when she became a powerful magician. Maki cursed the days she was young so much and abhorred the people there.

There wasn't that big of a difference in how slaves were treated by slavers, regardless of if it was in a real country or a magical country. Everything was a whirlpool of violence and malice. If one were to believe in someone they would be betrayed, and their days would be spent being used. Maki abhorred lies and schemes because she had grown up in such horrid place.

Because of that, Maki remembered the cold she was feeling right now. Her exhausted body couldn't move, and she had no sensation left in her cold limbs. The only numbing cold she could feel was in her heart as her body couldn't feel anything anymore. After taking a severe beating, she had been thrown into the dungeon midwinter and was dying. It was the day when she had attempted an escape, only to be betrayed by her best friend. The cold feeling Maki could sense right now was very similar to what she felt back then in that dungeon.

So in the end, I'll die in this cold…

Maki smiled wryly. Of course, her face didn't move a muscle as it was only in her mind.

The reason why Maki hadn't died in the dungeon was because the previous Dark Navy had noticed Maki's magic power and bought her. Despite that, Maki was now dying, feeling the same cold as she had felt back then.

But everything makes sense like this. Because at the time, I had only wished for power to take revenge on those guys…

Thanks to the previous Dark Navy, her wish had been fulfilled. Having grown up as a magician, Maki got her revenge on the slavers and her past best friend. And now she was back to feeling the same coldness. Maki was convinced that this was her fate. She hadn't even wished to live back then. Ever since that time, Maki had been tired of this world full of cheating, betrayal and abuse.

Eh…?

However, that was when Maki felt something different from when she was dying in past. Since she had almost no sensation in her body, she wasn't sure what that was at first.

What is, this…?

But as time passed, her sensations gradually returned, and she understood that the sensation was warmth. At the same time she understood that, she noticed the presence of someone nearby.

Corpse looters? Or did a beast come to eat me…?

Maki knew that only something like that would come to her side as she was dying. So she ignored that presence and focused on the warmth. That was because when she really died, she wanted to feel warmth.

This… is the same thing…

However, that was when Maki noticed that the warmth originated from the presence. And she finally realized it wasn't corpse looters or a beast. Something warm was by Maki's side.

Are you, lonely too…? Just like, me…?

However at the center of the warm presence was a cold part. Maki knew why that was, it was because she was the same. So Maki overlapped the same part inside of her with the cold part.

I wish we could always be like this…

And by overlapping the two, those parts might warm up a little. However, Maki knew that she didn't have much time left for that. And she felt that it was regrettable.

Escaping From the Dungeon

Part 2

When Maki regained her consciousness the first thing she heard was a man's loud voice.

“Breathe, Aika-san! Don't you die on me!”

Maki tried to smile at the voice.

It's fine, I'll be fine for a little longer, so don't worry…

However, she didn't know if her face actually showed her smile or not. If she didn't breathe, she might not be able to properly smile. Worried, Maki started breathing.

“*cough* *cough*”

However, Maki's injured body couldn't properly do that. This resulted to her coughing repeatedly.

“Aika-san!! Damnit, is the magic of the cane not enough!?”

“*cough* *cough*”

For each time she coughed she could feel herself getting weaker. Knowing that would make the owner of the voice sad, she tried her best to breathe.

Somehow… it's different from before…

In the past, she desperately tried breathing because she wanted revenge. But now, Maki was breathing for a different reason.

“Hah, Hah, Hah.”

“That's right, breathe, Aika-san!!”

Something deep inside Maki's mind supported her. Something small she had only been able to remember thanks to her dying mind turning hazy.

I can't betray, deceive or lie to this memory. If I do, I and this person will be all alone…

Thanks to Maki trying to live, oxygen began spreading throughout her body. Eventually it dispelled the haziness clouding her mind and brought out her normal personality.

“W-Where am…?”

Feeling as if she had suddenly woken up from a dream, Maki was puzzled by the change in her surroundings.

Maki's last memory was of her being swept away by the avalanche. But right now, she found herself in a dim, dusty lodge. Maki was lying down on the floor and staring up at the small light bulb hanging down from the ceiling.

“Aika-san!? You woke up!?”

As she blinked repeatedly, a person's face appeared in front of her. Because the light bulb was so dazzling, she didn't have to blink as much thanks to the light being cut off.

“Satomi, Koutarou…?”

With her mind completely awake, Maki recognized the man in front of her.

“That's right, it's me! Keep it together!”

Satomi Koutarou. He was a man who could use a sword, magic and even necromancy, an opponent who had outsmarted Maki repeatedly in the past.

Maki's memories alerted her repeatedly and the spells she had cast in order to face Koutarou activated one after another. To her, Koutarou was pure and simply an enemy.

Escaping From the Dungeon

“How's your body!? Are you okay!?”

“…No. It looks bad.”

Maki smiled at Koutarou who desperately called out to her. It was not an act or being sarcastic, it was just a natural smile that appeared on her face.

Why am I smiling at this man…?

If Maki had been able to move her arms, she would probably be touching her face because she couldn't understand her own actions. Despite that, her feelings were oddly enough accepting it. The strong feelings telling her that this was fine ruled her mind.

“I can tell. With this wound, I can't be saved.”

As Maki said that she shook her head. She understood the wound she had suffered very well. Despite her young age, she was a veteran warrior who had survived a lot of battles. Her experience told her that the wound she had suffered was fatal, and that she had only regained consciousness through chance.

Ah, maybe that's why…

Maki believed the reason why she didn't feel any hostility towards Koutarou was because she would die soon.

“Aika-san, don't say things like that!”

To Maki, Koutarou appeared to be shining green.

Ah, he really is worried…

Koutarou's body was wrapped in a stable green light. It was proof that he wasn't lying.

But still… this man isn't lying at all… Is he skillfully cheating me again…?

The spell that Maki had prepared to fight Koutarou, the spell that let her see through lies, hadn't reacted even once.

Or maybe I've gotten weaker… I've probably gotten weaker. I'm dying this disgracefully after all.

Regardless of if Koutarou wasn't lying or if he had outsmarted Maki in some ways, Maki was getting herself worked up for no reason. She couldn't help but find that funny.

“Aika-san…”

Even though she knew that she was going to die, Maki smiled. Her harsh life up until now had made her give up. But Koutarou wasn't able to laugh or give up seeing that.

This cane isn't enough!

Koutarou strongly clenched his fist that was holding the magical cane. Just a little while ago, he had been trying to use that staff to heal Maki. However the results were not looking good. The cane’s magic was still healing her, but Maki's life force was fading faster. Since Koutarou could see spiritual energy, he could easily tell that much.

It'll take too long to get her onboard the Blue Knight!! How can I save Aika-san!?

On Theia's spaceship, the Blue Knight, there were far more advanced medical devices than anything found on Earth. However, it didn't have the power to revive someone fatally wounded that even magic can't heal.

“It's fine, Satomi-kun. I believe this is my fate.”

Maki accepted her own death. Looking back at her life, this wasn't a bad way to go. Just having someone worry over her was a good way to end.

Escaping From the Dungeon

My only regret is not knowing if he's really worrying over me or not…

So Maki simply smiled, accepting her fate.

“Fate!? As if I could accept this kind of fate!!”

Koutarou shouted out and denied Maki's words. Koutarou knew of a girl who had fought against such hardships. Koutarou couldn't accept Maki's death. And since he didn't want Maki to accept it either, he raised his voice even more.

“I, I won't accept this kind of fate!! I will never—”

However, in the middle of his sentence Koutarou remembered something.

“—Wait, fate!? That's right, I still have that!!”

That was the last means left to Koutarou. He still had a small chance of saving Maki's life.

“Clan! Clan!”

Koutarou hurriedly operated his bracelet and called out Clan's name.

“What is it, at such a time?”

Despite it being night, Clan's voice responded. Apparently she wasn't sleeping yet. Hearing her voice, Koutarou's expression lit up.

“It's an emergency! I need the sword!”

“Just wait a moment. In three minutes, I'll finish the first stage of my experiment. Then I'll—”

“I can't wait three minutes!! I told you it's an emergency!!”

“Wait wait, just waiiit!! Don't be so unreasonable!!”

Sensing what Koutarou was about to do from the tone of his voice, Clan began panicking. However, Koutarou ignored her objections and ordered the bracelet.

“Cradle! Give me my sword!”

“As you wish, my lord.”

“Kyaaaaaaa!! I'm telling you to waiiit!!”

Ignoring Clan's intentions, her small spaceship, the Cradle, began moving. At this time, Koutarou's sword was being experimented on in the Cradle's laboratory. But upon receiving Koutarou's order, the Cradle forcibly terminated the experiment and began to transfer the sword to him.

“Curse you, Bertorion! Don't you forget this!”

“Comeeee!! Signaltiiiin!!”

Completely ignoring Clan's objections, Koutarou thrust his right arm forward. As he did, a black hole appeared a few centimeters in front of his palm. That was a space-time hole produced by the Cradle and Koutarou's bracelet.

“Sa… Satomi-kun, what are you…?”

Maki stared on at the spectacle unfolding in front of her, completely dumbfounded.

Since Maki could use some spells that warped space, she understood that the black hole was a hole in space-time, connected to somewhere else. However, she couldn't sense any magic coming from the hole. Maki didn't think it was possible to create a space-time hole without using magic. And her surprise made her temporarily forget about her pain.

“Call sign confirmed, coordinate axis fixed. Commencing transfer of Signaltin.”

Escaping From the Dungeon

Suddenly a sword appeared from out of the hole. As the sword appeared, Koutarou felt like he had heard an explosion and a woman's scream, but Koutarou didn't hesitate to grab his sword.

“Your excellency, Blue Knight, this ship, the Cradle, will pray for your fortune and glory in place of the nation of Forthorthe.”

“…Thank you.”

When Koutarou grabbed the handle, the sword began shining bright white. At the same time, the sword began emitting an immense amount of magic power.

White magic!! Room 106's power, just like that time!? But the energy he's controlling this time is far greater!!

Despite dealing with magic on a daily basis, Maki was so surprised by the massive amount of magic power that she couldn't even let out a voice of surprise.

“Let's do this, Signaltin!”

Koutarou pulled the sword still in its sheath out of the space-time hole. He then began concentrating, holding the handle in his right hand and the sheath in his left.

Your majesty, Alaia, I'm sorry for this being such a private reason, but I will be borrowing the power of this sword…

Having finished concentrating, Koutarou opened his eyes and began moving his hands apart.

Accompanied with a ringing noise, the glowing white blade slowly appeared from behind the sheath. Correspondingly, the white magic power filling the room grew stronger and stronger. And once Koutarou had pulled the sword out of the sheath he slowly shouted.

“Signaltin, if you really have the power to shape the future, then please cut open this girl's future!!”

The next moment, the sword began glowing at an almost explosive force. A flash of light lit up the small lodge that Koutarou and Maki were in. The glow began to overflow from the sword and began pouring into Maki.

A portion of the magic power being emitted from Signaltin was converted into light and filled the lodge Koutarou and Maki were in. The light was so strong, they could see only white and nothing else. However, the light didn't harm them; instead, it gently wrapped them in a warmth, similar to that of a person.

What…?

In that white world, Koutarou found something. Since his entire surroundings had been filled with a strong white light, he might not have actually seen it with his eyes. However, it did exist within the white light, and it had a clear appearance in Koutarou's mind.

A small, girl?

It was a young girl covered in wounds. That girl had been thrown into a dungeon after being beaten up and left to die.

Just what, am I seeing…?

At the same time, Maki could see something in the light as well. It was a young boy holding a half-knitted sweater, crying.

Koutarou had seen that girl before, and Maki had seen that boy before. The two of them thought at the same time.

“Just wait, I'll save you right now!”

“It's okay, I'll always be with you…”

Since the two of them were different, the words they had used were different, but their feelings were the same.

Part 3

When Koutarou returned to himself, the light had died down. The only thing lighting up the dusty lodge was a lone, unshaded light bulb. The sword had a dim glow, but it wasn't enough to light up the room.

How is Aika-san!?

Koutarou immediately recalled that and looked at Maki. All that could be seen through the tear in her clothes was her white skin. Just a moment ago, she had a large wound in her side and was bleeding profusely. However, that wound was now gone, and the spilled blood had vanished. All Koutarou could see was her white skin.

“It worked… t-thank god…”

Koutarou let out a large sigh of relief and held up Signaltin's sheath. Koutarou hadn't been certain that he would be able to save Maki using this sword. So he was really, really relieved.

At the same time, Maki was gradually regaining consciousness. However, Maki was still not fully aware and was blankly staring up at the roof of the lodge.

I feel like something very important just…?

Maki could feel like something important had just happened. However, that was just a sensation without memory, and after a few seconds it disappeared just like a dream.

Maki returned to her senses after hearing the sound of Koutarou returning his sword to its sheath.

“Ah… I…?”

In that moment, Maki remembered everything that had happened. Her encounter with the demon that ended in a serious injury, and Koutarou desperately trying to treat her. Those memories let her understand why she was now lying down in this lodge. The first thing she did after returning to her senses was to check on her own wounds.

“The wound is gone!?”

Maki was overwhelmed with surprise when she touched her side. The wound that was supposed to be there was completely gone. Even the blood that had flowed out from it had vanished. Since her wound had disappeared, so did the pain. She no longer felt the cold that had numbed her entire body either. It was almost like her having been wounded in the first place was a dream. The only thing that claimed that it wasn't a dream was her torn clothing.

“I'm, alive…?”

Maki raised her body and peeked at her exposed side. There she could see her own white skin, her wound really had disappeared.

“Looks like it.”

“S-Satomi-kun…?”

As she was surprised, a ski jacket was put over Maki's shoulders. Worrying about Maki being cold in her magical girl outfit, Koutarou had taken off his jacket and put it on Maki. It wasn't until then that Maki remembered Koutarou's existence. She had been so surprised and had temporarily forgotten.

“Anyways, I'm glad you're okay.”

“…You saved me, right, Satomi-kun?”

Maki looked at what was lying next to Koutarou.

Escaping From the Dungeon

It was Yurika's new cane, Encyclopedia, and Koutarou's sword, Saguratin. Those two new magic tools had saved Maki's life. And it was almost definitely those that were behind the increase in room 106's magic power.

However, there were still a lot of questions. How did Koutarou save Maki using those? And how did he obtain those tools? As the magical girl Dark Navy of Darkness Rainbow, the tools were packed with information she wanted to know.

“I guess that would be the case.”

“Satomi-kun, are you a magician…?”

However, Maki questions to Koutarou were unrelated to that. The girl Aika Maki wanted to know more about the man Satomi Koutarou.

“No.”

Koutarou clearly denied it.

There was no change in the spell Maki was using to detect lies. Even now Koutarou wasn't lying. So as Dark Navy, she should change her question; as there was a more calm and logical method of questioning.

“That can't be true! No matter how you look at it, what you did wasn't normal!”

However, Maki didn't give in. She herself wanted to understand what kind of existence Koutarou was. It was a very emotional questioning without any of Dark Navy's normal calmness or rationality.

“I'm really not. The tools are what's not normal. I'm just a normal high school student.”

Koutarou was planning on being honest. He knew that after showing Maki that, there was no way he could cover it up. He had resolved himself for that when he decided to save Maki.

“What do you mean?”

“A while ago, something major happened. You know, when we were doing the play.”

On the day of the play, Clan had appeared, targeting Theia and Koutarou. That had been the start of it all.

So it really was during the play…

Koutarou's story matched with what Maki had conjectured.

“There were some people helping me during that event, and among them were a few people that could use magic. I got this sword and cane from those people.”

As he said that, Koutarou presented the cane to Maki. Koutarou smiled wryly as she received the cane.

“So while I think it's magic, I don't really understand the details. I was told how to use it, but I don't know how it works.”

“I see…”

Maki nodded and examined the cane in her hands.

As I thought, the magic type is considerably old… it seems to be using ancient language of magic, and the same as what controls the magic in room 106. However, it was made quite recently… which means, it must have been made by magicians with no direct relation to Folsaria…

Escaping From the Dungeon

The current practice in Folsaria uses reorganized, modern language. However, the magic in the cane used a much older form than that. Which meant that it must have been made by magicians who split up with Folsaria quite a long time ago.

This cane executes magic almost entirely on its own, just like he said. Because of that mechanism and the vast amount of spells it contains, it's wasting the artifact-rank magic power it has. So on its own it's not a big threat… but when used the way Yurika did, it's quite troublesome…

That was what Maki concluded upon examining the cane. Thanks to that, Maki was able to see the total picture behind Yurika's power up. The power of her magic hadn't increased, but she had evolved in a direction that had made it very hard to fight her.

And the sword is the same as this cane. It does a lot on its own… So while the sword is powerful, Koutarou is just a normal human. Which means that what happened last time must have been a similar situation.

Maki's image of Koutarou began being greatly corrected. Because of that, Maki was able to realize her own misunderstanding.

In the past, Maki had assumed Koutarou was a powerful magician, based on the fact that he had gotten through her barrier, brought Sanae with him and used a powerful magic sword. She thought he had the power of reinforcement or degeneration and necromancy.

However, with her new reasoning, a completely different development could have occurred. First off, since he had a powerful magic sword that interfered with the opponent's magic, he had been able to slip through the barrier. And the ghost had followed him of its own will. Maki had hid the truth herself by disregarding the most unlikely event.

And I feared lies and schemes that didn't even exist. I never even saw the man in front of me…

Right now, Maki no longer feared Koutarou. It was a strange feeling; despite having an overly powerful sword in front of her and knowing that she had no chance to win, Maki had no fear of Koutarou. At worst, she felt like it would probably hurt when she lost.

What is this feeling I wonder… Why am I so relieved? Even though it's an opponent I have no chance of beating in my current state…

Maki was confused, however that was only on the surface. Deep inside her heart, she was calm, satisfied with this situation.

“Achoo.”

At that moment, Koutarou sneezed. Since it had been somewhat of a surprise attack as she was deep in thought, Maki's eyes opened wide. However, the next moment, after seeing Koutarou's silly face, Maki raised her voice and began laughing.

“Fufufufu, Ahahaha.”

“Don't laugh. I'm in the middle of an important story.”

Koutarou dropped his shoulders as he saw Maki laugh. His cheeks turned slightly red out of embarrassment.

“I-I'm sorry. It's cold isn't it? Do you want this jacket back?”

Maki apologized, but she was still happily laughing. She then covered her mouth with her hand in an attempt to suppress her laughter and touched the jacket on her shoulders. Koutarou had sneezed because he had lent Maki his jacket.

“I don't need it. I'm not that cold.”

“Ah…”

In that moment, Maki could see the green light enveloping Koutarou shaking. The spell Maki was using to see through lies had seen through Koutarou.

Satomi-kun lied to me…

Maki had been more surprised by that than the sneeze. Maki hated lies and deceit more than anything, she abhorred betrayal and schemes. Because of that, the moment Maki heard Koutarou lie, her heart leapt.

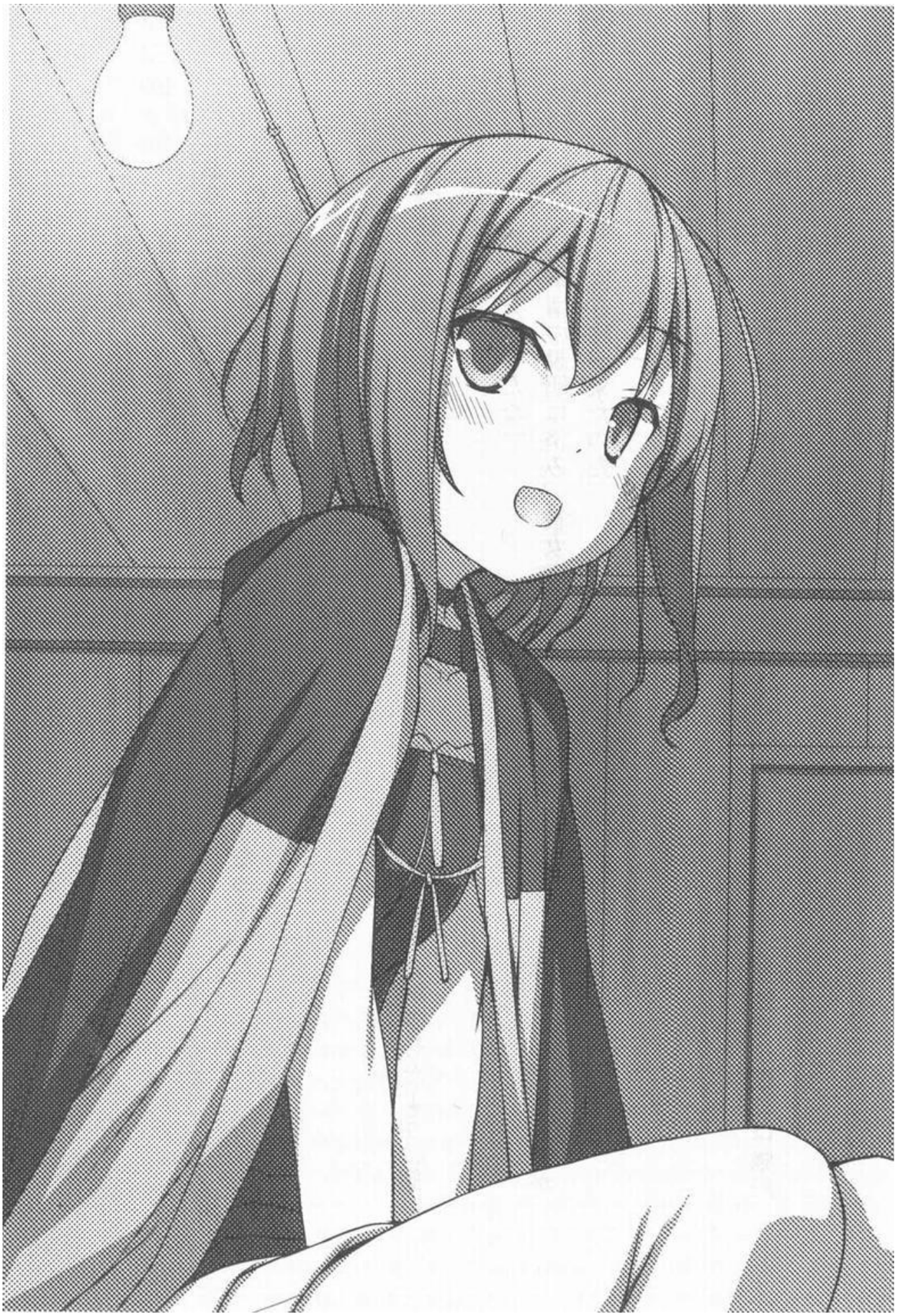
He really does lie… That's right, there's no human who doesn't lie…

Maki's heart began intensely throbbing and she felt as if something was burning in her heart. This was the first time she had felt something like that.

“Satomi-kun, you're not a good liar.”

“It's not a lie. A man wouldn't lose to the cold.”

“Didn't you sneeze because you lost though?”



Maki smiled, but this time it was a much, much brighter smile than before.

“Ugh.”

“Actually, Satomi-kun, I hate people who lie.”

“I see. Then we'll make good friends.”

“That's true. Fufufufu.”

Maki slightly tilted her head and showed a bit of mischief in her smile. It was a smile that she had never shown anyone.

“Fufufu, I think people who trick others with lies are the worst!”

Maki was happy that Koutarou had lied to her.

This was the first time that she had ever been happy that someone lied to her.

This person's lies aren't scary at all!!

Not even Maki knew why she felt that way. She didn't know, but she still felt like this was okay.

“Definitely.”

“Fufufufu, ahahaha!”

And so, Maki terminated the spells she had activated.

“…Satomi-kun you liar! I hate you!”

“Hoh?”

Maki no longer had a need to confirm if Koutarou was speaking the truth.

Part 4

Koutarou looked at Maki laughing for a while before eventually nodding.

“Alright, you look like you're okay.”

He had finished explaining the situation to her and she seemed to have recovered. Koutarou decided to move on to the next matter.

“Aika-san, the cane please.”

Koutarou reached his hand out towards Maki.

“Satomi-kun?”

When Maki raised her eyes, Koutarou was already standing. His expression was serious and she sensed a strong will in his eyes.

“Please give me back the cane. I have to go save Yurika.”

“Save Yurika-san… O-Oh right, that white demon!”

After hearing Koutarou say that he was going to go save Yurika, Maki finally remembered the situation. That she had climbed the mountain to obtain a familiar, been met with resistance and that Yurika had been frozen and captured.

Maki was still in the midst of fighting.

“So you saw it too, Aika-san. In that case this'll be easy to explain. I have to beat that and save Yurika.”

As Koutarou said that he looked out through the window of the lodge. A blizzard was blowing outside and he couldn't see a thing. However, in the direction he was looking at, Yurika was frozen and waiting to be saved.

To think monsters like that existed on Earth too…

Koutarou strongly grasped Signaltin's sheath. This wasn't the first time Koutarou had encountered abnormal monsters. And based on his experience, Signaltin should be able to deal with it.

“So please, give me back the cane. I will probably need that too.

Koutarou's Signaltin was very powerful , however since he had used it to heal the fatally wounded Maki, it's power had temporarily grown weaker. In order to compensate for that, Encyclopedia was the perfect tool. Koutarou was planning on fighting using both sword and magic.

Return the cane…?

Maki was a magical girl of Darkness Rainbow. So putting some sort of curse on the cane before returning it to Koutarou would be best. She would be able to use the cane as a trap against Yurika.

However—

“Satomi-kun.”

However, Maki couldn't give him the cane back.

“Since I've gotten better, should I help too?”

So Maki smiled at Koutarou, holding the cane in both of her hands.

Maki's suggestion was simple.

Escaping From the Dungeon

Koutarou was an amateur when it comes to magic. So it would be better to have one person focus on the sword, and another on magic.

It was a perfectly logical reasoning.

“—is what I think, how about it?”

“How about it, huh…”

From Koutarou's standpoint, he wanted to say no. He was reluctant to drag a normal girl like Maki into a fight, but he understood what she was saying. He didn't think that he'd be able to pull off something as dexterous as using a sword and a cane at the same time. It was true that he wanted an expert to use magic while he focused on his sword.

“I have a piece of good news and advice for you since you're struggling to make up your mind, Satomi-kun.”

“What?”

“I got an A in PE. By the way, Yurika got an E.” [2]

Koutarou made up his mind as he saw Maki boasting.

“Alright, I'll leave the cane to you, Aika-san.”

“Really!?”

Maki's expression lit up.

In reality, Aika-san looks like she would be stronger with the cane than Yurika…

Maki obviously had a better trained body than Yurika. And based just on her physical strength, Koutarou felt that Maki was more suited to be a magical girl than Yurika.

“In exchange, you have to run away if things get really dangerous. If you do, I can run away without worrying as well.”

The only thing Koutarou was worried about was that she would try harder than he expects her to. Since he had managed to save Maki from the brink of death, he wanted her to at least get to safety if things got too bad.

“…Liar.”

“Eh?”

However, Maki didn't nod her head. Instead, she stared at Koutarou with a glance full of doubt.

“Satomi-kun, you won't run away even if things turn dangerous, will you?”

“That's not true. I'd quickly run away.”

Koutarou panickingly shook his head.

“That's a lie. There's no way you would run away without having saved Yurika-san.”

Maki was no longer using her spell to discern lies. However, she still knew that Koutarou would never leave Yurika behind to save himself.

“Aika-san…”

Koutarou had nothing he could say. His real intentions were just as Maki had said.

“In that case, we'll share the same fate.”

[2] A grade marking barely passing in Japan, though not commonly used.

Escaping From the Dungeon

Holding the cane in both hands, Maki looked at Koutarou with a serious look on her face.

“Please steel yourself, Satomi-kun. I definitely won't leave you on your own. In exchange—”

“Fine, I understand. I'll protect you.”

In the end, Koutarou was the one who gave in. The best chance Koutarou had of saving Yurika was if he and Maki truly worked together. That's what he himself believed.

“…It's almost like you're proposing. Fufufu.”

Maki smiled, she seemed awfully happy. Koutarou didn't know the meaning behind it, but Maki's smile seemed to overlap with Yurika's, so Koutarou attitude instinctively changed.

“You idiot, be more serious.”

“Okay, Captain!”

Maki smiled at Koutarou and jokingly saluted.

And just like that, the strange team that consisted of Koutarou and Maki was formed.

Escaping From the Dungeon

Part 5

The lodge Koutarou had escaped to with Maki wasn't that far away from the cave. It had been used when the power line was being constructed, so it was left vacant.

As Koutarou and Maki headed for the cave, they didn't come across anyone else. The two of them advanced as the snow and wind intensely raged on.

“By the way, why were you in the mountain, Aika-san? Yurika was really worried about you.”

“Ah, that's because of that white demon?”

However, neither of them seemed to be very bothered by that. This was thanks to the spell that Maki had cast. The two of them casually walked forward, ignoring the harsh winds, the steep slope, the darkness and the ever dropping temperature.

“Did it catch you?”

“Aah, uhm, well, something like that.”

“I see. That was too bad.”

“…Though to be more precise, I came to capture it.”

“What was that?”

“I said I would have been in danger if Satomi-kun and Yurika-san hadn't come. It seems like that demon is very violent and attacks people on sight.”

“I see. Then let's be careful to reduce the danger.”

“Let's do that.”

The two carefully climbed the slope while keeping an eye on the peak. Since they didn't have to fight the harshness of the mountain thanks to magic, they had a little bit more room to concentrate on the demon and Yurika.

“Satomi-kun!”

“Wah.”

After climbing up for a while, Maki suddenly grabbed a hold of Koutarou and knocked him down onto the snow.

“W-What!?”

“Shh!! …Don't you see it!? Over there!!”

Maki blocked Koutarou's mouth with her left hand and pointed with her right, while whispering to Koutarou.

“Mhh~”

The white demon in question was up the slope where Maki was pointing. Next to it was Yurika, still frozen. Maki had noticed that before him and stopped Koutarou from moving to keep the white demon from noticing.

“I'll let go now.”

“Hm.”

Maki waited for Koutarou to notice the demon before removing her hand.

“Hah, thank you, Aika-san.”

“You're welcome.”

Escaping From the Dungeon

“Yurika is…”

Having crawled out from under Maki, the first thing Koutarou did was check up on Yurika. Fortunately, Yurika's spiritual energy wasn't so weak that she was in any danger of dying right away. Koutarou relaxed his shoulders when he realized that.

“Phew, she seems to be okay…”

Koutarou had been worried that she might die while he was treating Maki or that the demon would destroy her along with the pillar of ice, but after finding out that Yurika was safe, Koutarou let out a huge sigh of relief. His fighting spirit was lit anew when he learned that he still had a chance to save her.

“So what do we do, Satomi-kun?”

“Hm? What?”

“Don't you think it'd be dangerous if we just charged straight in?”

As Maki said that she pointed to her surroundings. That was where they had been swept up by the avalanche. Up until now there had been a lot of trees covering their approach, but from now on the woods stopped and if they continued forward they would be in the wide open.

“…It'll definitely try to do something.”

“I think it will start another avalanche.”

“I'd rather not go through that again…”

It was possible that the white demon might cause another avalanche if it spotted Koutarou and Maki climbing up. That had been part of the reason for why Maki had stopped Koutarou.

“Should we go around and climb up?”

“Hmmmm…”

Having heard Maki's proposal, Koutarou looked to his left and right. From what he could see there were a lot more trees to the side. If they went around, they would be able to hide more easily from the white demon as they climbed up.

“Let's not.”

However, in the end, Koutarou gave up on circling around. If they did, the risk of being found would be lower, but after climbing for a while, the trees would stop, and they would be in the same situation again.

“So what do we do? If we just roll our thumbs here, Yurika-san will be in danger.”

“That's true, but can't we lure that thing towards us somehow?”

“Lure it?”

Maki's eyes opened wide in surprise after hearing an intellectual idea from the normally simple Koutarou.

Normally simple Satomi-kun?

Maki gave up on her own idea and began laughing on the inside. She had only been able to resolve her own misunderstanding and come in touch with the real Koutarou just a few moments ago. Despite that, she already pretended like she knew everything, and felt like an intellectual idea didn’t fit coming from Koutarou. Maki found the speed she had changed funny.

“Yeah. I feel like that would be better.”

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When Koutarou was in Forthorthe, he had taken part in several large-scale battles. In those battles, the strategy of luring an enemy out had proved to be effective. Those experiences clearly remained in Koutarou's memories.

Right. If we lure it here, we can ambush and separate it from Nijino Yurika. You put some thought into this, Satomi-kun.

Sensing where Koutarou was coming from, she added her own opinion into it after thinking for a moment.

“So we're luring that demon out so we can save Yurika-san first, right?”

“Eh?”

This time, Koutarou was surprised. What Maki had said was just what he was about to consult with her.

“We're not?”

“A-Ah, no… That's what I want to do, but I wanted to check with you if that would be okay.”

When Koutarou explained that to Maki, she clapped her hands together as if she noticed something.

“I see. Since you don't know how much time you can buy, you don't know if you can save Yurika-san before the demon returns, right?”

“Y-Yeah.”

What Maki said was exactly what Koutarou was about to say.

This again… Aika-san, can you read my mind?

With the timing of Maki's remarks, Koutarou began to wonder about such a foolish thing.

And while Koutarou was surprised, Maki began thinking hard.

What happens if we can't save her?

Maki quickly put her thoughts and was about to tell Koutarou. But…

“If we don't manage to save her, that demon will know that we're trying to save Yurika and might target her instead.”

Oh?

This time Koutarou said what Maki was about to say. Since Koutarou had said word for word what Maki was about to say, her eyes opened wide in surprise.

Can Satomi-kun read my mind perhaps?

Maki was also puzzled over her and Koutarou's seemingly overlapping minds.

“In that case, luring it over and beating it would be better.”

“That's right. What do you think?”

“Fufufu, what do I think? I just said beating it would be better.”

“Oh right, sorry.”

Koutarou and Maki agreed on luring the demon out and ambushing it.

Even if they lured it out and managed to save Yurika, there was a high chance that the three of them would be forced to fight against the demon. In that case, luring it out and ambushing it would be more certain. That was how Koutarou and Maki felt.

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“…I feel like this method of attack is more fitting of a villain, I don't really like it.”

“Me neither.”

“Right. Rather than using petty tricks, you'd rather go face to face, right?”

“But, if it stays in front of Yurika-san like that, there's nothing we can do.”

“I guess we have to…”

“We're just civilians after all.”

“That's true… let's not be overly ambitious.”

The two of them were both reluctant to resort to ambushing, however, in the end they had to prioritize Yurika's safety first, so they steeled their resolve.

Part 6

Maki's specialty, mind manipulation magic, was quite similar to magic that created illusions. It goes to reason that she was relatively good at the latter as well.

So instead of using Encyclopedia's magic power, she used her own. That way, the spell would be more accurate and powerful.

“You can do it!”

Maki had created an illusion of Koutarou. It was really well made and Koutarou instinctively cheered for the illusion that was walking as he looked at it from behind. Reacting to Koutarou's voice, the illusion turned around and waved its hand.

“Uwah!? It answered!? Creepy!!”

The illusion Maki had created had a little consciousness. It was like an autonomous robot that could move on its own. The illusion walked away on its own; it would be acting as a decoy.

“Creepy… you're always like that, Satomi-kun.”

“I'm way manlier and I'm not that weak looking.”

“That's not true. You're just like that.”

The illusion had been created based on Maki's recognition of Koutarou. Because of that, small portions of it were slightly different from the real one. In Maki's mind, Koutarou was slightly slimmer and more handsome. So it strayed a little from Koutarou's ideal view of a man.

“Is that really so…”

“More importantly, let's get ready. There are a lot of preparations that have to be made before Satomi-kun No.2 lures the demon here.”

Maki didn't want Koutarou to poke around too much at her creation, so she quickly tried to change the subject. If thoroughly investigated, Koutarou might realize that the illusion was based off of Maki's ideal Koutarou.

“Sorry. So, where should I hide?”

“Since No.2 should be running past here, behind that tree should be fine.”

“Got it.”

Koutarou pulled his sword from its sheath and approached the tree by the mountain path. Since the illusion would be running down the path, he would attack the demon that should be right behind it.

“I'll cast some spells on you.”

“Please do. I'm not wearing my armor today.”

“Fufuf, then leave it to this magical girl, Maki.”

Maki laughed full of confidence and pointed her cane at Koutarou.

“Magic Armor. Shield. Elemental Protection…”

Maki let loose spell after spell. She used the power of Encyclopedia whenever it would be more powerful than her own magic. By doing that, she was also able to conserve her own magic power.

This cane might be far more convenient than I thought…

Escaping From the Dungeon

Since Maki often fought on her own, she couldn't really understand the true value of the cane until she had used it for herself. If one was to fight alongside their allies, there wasn't a cane more useful than this. Before long, Koutarou had been strengthened with several different spells.

“I’ll cast the next spells based on the situation.”

“Got it. Aika-san, you should go hide too.”

“Okay.”

Having finished casting her spells, Maki headed towards a bush a little away from Koutarou. She would be supporting Koutarou from there.

“Ah!? Satomi-san, it seems like No.2 was found by the demon. He's heading this way while being under attack.”

Maki warned Koutarou and jumped into the bush.

“…So we really do need to fight it…”

Koutarou had only seen the demon roar when it was standing next to a frozen Yurika. Based on that circumstantial evidence and Maki's testimony, Koutarou believed the demon was violent and he was going to have to fight it. But even then, now that he actually had to fight, Koutarou couldn’t help but feel depressed.

“Alright…”

But no matter how depressed he got, he couldn't leave Yurika behind. Having resolved himself, Koutarou peeked out from behind the tree and looked at the path the illusion would be running down. There, he saw the illusion of himself, and behind him was the white demon. Seeing that, Koutarou's expression changed.

“Aika-san, this is bad! It's chasing after No.2 in the air!”

The white demon was floating behind Koutarou No.2 while repeatedly firing shards of ice at him. The illusion was dodging those attacks while running down the pre-designated route, but there was one problem. The demon was flying far too high, Koutarou wouldn't be able to reach it with his sword.

“Hopping Carrot!”

Maki's response was a new spell. Yellow light enveloped Koutarou's legs. It was a spell that increased his jumping power.

“You should reach it with that!”

“I'll give it a shot!”

Koutarou and Maki's conversation was short. Since the demon was already approaching, they didn't have the luxury for a leisurely chat. There was no point in their ambush if they were found.

A little while after that, No.2 approached the two. While replicating the sound of running on snow, No.2 ran past the mountain path near where Koutarou and Maki were hiding.

“Gaaaaaaa, Gruuuuuaaaaaa!!”

The white demon was right behind him. It had been completely fooled by the splendid illusion and was frantically trying to kill it.

“Die, Diee, Vadra, Dieee!!”

While shouting something, the demon shot shards of ice from the palm of its hand. Some of the ice shards penetrated through the illusion.

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“It dos no wok! Magi is no wokin! Vadra rely is a monser!”

If the demon had been level-headed it might have been able to see through the trick. However, it was so frantic that it had lost all calm.

“Now!!”

And that was the perfect opening for Koutarou. As the demon flew right past him, Koutarou kicked the ground with all his might and came swinging at the demon in the sky.

“Gaaaaaaaa!?”

Koutarou's swing hit right at where he aimed, at the wings on the back of the white demon. The blow caused the demon to lose its balance and it fell towards the ground.

“It was too shallow!?”

However, at the same time Koutarou clicked his tongue, the demon flapped its large wings and made a soft landing. Koutarou's sword had only damaged its wings, but they were not completely unusable.

The plan had been perfect as the demon showed its defenseless back to Koutarou, however a jumping attack had been problematic. Since he had been strengthened by a magic he wasn't used too, he slightly messed up the force used to jump.

“Can I do it again!?”

Koutarou readied his sword once more. His first attack had been too shallow, however the demon was landing with its back turned towards Koutarou. If Koutarou moved well enough after landing, he would be in a position where he could make a second attack.

I'm not sure about the timing, but I can do it!!

However, the demon didn't just remain like that. It had already recovered from the shock of the ambush and had already begun defending and dodging to avoid any further attacks. It was questionable of whether or not a second attack would succeed.

“Force Field!”

Two spells came flying towards Koutarou. One was a defensive spell that would block attacks. The other was a spell that let Koutarou freely control his falling speed. Oddly enough, the defensive spell didn't directly protect him; rather, it deployed a surface like a wall next to him.

“Satomi-kun, use that—”

“This'll help!”

Koutarou kicked the magic wall and slightly altered the direction he was falling in.

“—as footing!!”

Koutarou had acted before Maki could even finish her sentence. She then accelerated Koutarou after he adjusted his direction. That was the second spell she had cast using the cane, a spell to freely control the falling speed.

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“Haaaaaaaaaaa!!”

The white demon was in the direction Koutarou had jumped to. He then swung his sword with all of his might.

In response to Koutarou's will, the sword was enveloped by a shockwave. It was weaker than the barrier created by Theia's armor, but it served to improve the range and power of the sword.

Koutarou's sword crashed into the white demon. At the same time, the shock wave enveloping the sword was unleashed and assaulted the demon.

“Guuuuuuu, so tha is wher you ar, Vadra!”

However, the white demon wouldn't just let that happen. The thick slab of ice created in front of the demon served as a shield and caught Koutarou's attack. His sword broke it into pieces, but it wasn't able to reach the demon on the other side.

Signaltin's power really has weakened!! It didn't do as much damage as I thought it would!!

If Signaltin had been in its normal state, by the time the sword hit, it would reject the magic inside of the demon and cause major damage. That had been the case when fighting with demons in Forthorthe. However, that didn't happen now. Despite having attacked twice, the demon hadn't taken any damage.

“I kan tel!! Vadra, Signaltin is getin weaker is it no!?”

The white demon's mouth warped and it attacked Koutarou with its thick arms.

“Kil! It is my chans to kil!!”

The demon's claws came flying towards Koutarou.

“Satomi-kun, keep going like that!!”

Despite the attack having finished, Koutarou's body accelerated even further. It was like a powerful force trying to slam him into the ground.

“I got it!!”

Koutarou threw his body forward as if he was trying to roll. Thanks to Maki accelerating Koutarou even further, the demon's claw hit nothing but air.

After rolling, Koutarou kicked the snow and stood up. By that time, Maki had already cast a new spell on Koutarou.

“Flame Weapon!”

Maki had used her own magic power to cover Koutarou's sword in fire, increasing its attack power. She simultaneously used the cane to cast a spell that let Koutarou see heat with his eyes.

Koutarou's sword suddenly burst into flames. At the same time, everything past a certain temperature began glowing red to Koutarou. Of course, the thing glowing the most was Koutarou's sword.

Which means, the next one coming is…

Koutarou knew what was going to happen next, so Koutarou shouted out what he needed before it happened.

“Aika-san, make good use of the fire at the end!!”

“Quick Cast – Darkness!!”

At the same time, Maki's spell wrapped the region around Koutarou, herself and the demon in darkness. Having suddenly lost its vision, the demon stood still. However, the darkness didn't

matter as Koutarou could find the demon's body temperature and attack with his burning sword. He could clearly see his sword and the enemy's position, and thanks to the reflecting heat he could see the ground as well. There were no problems.

Koutarou's sword crashed into the white demon, but he felt a hard response. Once the demon could no longer see anything, it focused on protecting itself and had covered its entire body with a wall of ice.

So it did this after all!

Koutarou's sword crushed the wall of ice, but his blade failed to reach the demon. The only damage to the demon was that some of its fur got burnt by the flames on the sword.

“Guooooooo.”

If it stayed in the darkness it would keep getting attacked. Disliking that predicament, the demon flapped its damaged wings and flew up into the air.

“Satomi-kun, was using the fire like that good enough?”

“Like that? Like what?”

“I mean that. I tried copying Yurika.”

Maki indicated the area where the demon had flown.

“What's that?”

“It's a cloud. However—”

Maki had created a large cloud out of magic. Since it was floating right above the darkness, the demon had jumped into the cloud before realizing it was there.

“—it's a special cloud made out of highly volatile oil.”

The next moment, the burning fur of the demon lit the cloud and caused a large explosion.

While looking up at the large explosion, Koutarou felt surprised.

Can Aika-san really read my mind…?

What had surprised him wasn't the explosion, but all of Maki's actions during the fight.

Maki had predicted what Koutarou wanted to do and created a road of magic to allow that to happen. When he wanted to pursue, she had created foothold for him. When he wanted to dodge the enemy's claws, she had accelerated his body. When he was grieving that his sword lacked the power it needed, she had enchanted it with fire. And lastly, the large explosion that occurred above them.

This was at a completely different level from just being good at using magic. It was almost as if Maki knew what Koutarou was going to do and gave him just what he needed. Thanks to her, Koutarou hadn't taken a single hit of the demon's attacks until the explosion occurred.

On the other hand, Maki felt the same surprise Koutarou did.

Can Satomi-kun really read my mind…?

Maki was surprised by the same things Koutarou was. He had done everything she had wanted to do before her.

By the time Maki noticed that it was possible to pursue the demon that had landed, Koutarou had already readied his sword. By the time she thought that she could use the spell that controlled falling speed to avoid the demon's claws, Koutarou had already thrown his body forward before she could explain. And lastly, Koutarou had told Maki to make good use of the

fire at the end. As a result she had created an oil cloud. Because it disliked taking on attacks while defenseless, the demon had jumped into it of its own will.

Before the demon could even put up a fight, it was already in the middle of a large explosion. Maki looked up at the sky, but she didn't feel anything for the demon or explosion. Instead, what she felt was a strong sense of freedom. She probably wouldn't feel this free even if she could freely fly through the skies. The feeling of being able to do everything she wanted liberated her mind. She always wanted to stay like this.

“Hey, Aika-san, are you—”

“Satomi-kun, are you—”

Koutarou and Maki were about to say the same thing, but the two of them stopped at the same time.

Something dreamlike like that is impossible.

And the two of them thought that at the same time.

Part 7

After the explosion had died down and the remaining traces of it had been blown away, the white demon still remained. However, it had been scorched all over and its entire body had turned black. The demon flapped its injured wings and landed. It was covered in wounds, but its movements still looked very powerful.

“Kil, getin weaker but kil Vadra! Do no kil, I be kiled! I be ruined!”

“…Satomi-kun, looks like it still wants to fight.”

Seeing that, Maki grabbed the cane with both hands.

Vadra again… just what is that demon so scared of…?

That word bothered Maki, but the demon probably wouldn't answer her if she asked. So she drove her question out of her head and prepared to fight.

“It would be easier if it just ran away…”

The demon's will to fight reached Koutarou as well. He would have preferred if the demon had fled, but it seemed to be dead set on killing Koutarou and Maki. Koutarou reluctantly readied Signaltin.

“Flame Weapon, Flame Protection, Elemental Shield.”

“Aika-san, you're thinking of doing something cruel again, aren't you?”

“Fufu, but I love the Satomi-kun who still does it anyway.”

“Then I'll try to live up to your expectations.”

Koutarou's sword was covered in flames once more and two yellow lights protected him. Seeing that, the demon bared its fangs and threatened Koutarou.

“Goooaaaaaaaaa!”

“Here I go, Aika-san!”

“Quick Cast – Acceleration.”

Koutarou began moving just as Maki started her incantation. The demon began moving at the same time. Seeing Koutarou's burning sword, the demon decided to fight up close. If it tried to fly away, things might go like last time. The demon had painfully learned that.

“Here it comes.”

As Koutarou said that, a new spell enveloped his body, and his running speed dramatically increased. Maki had cast a spell that increased his physical strength.

“Dieeeee!!”

The demon wasn't just running up either. It created shards of ice and repeatedly fired them at Koutarou like a machine gun. And from behind the barrage, it aimed at Koutarou with its claws.

“Hah!”

Koutarou slid under the shards of ice. As he did, the demon came attacking with the claws on both of its hands.

“Satomi-kun, jump!”

Koutarou poured power into his legs, and at the same time, the snow beneath his feet was sent flying upwards. Normally it was a spell used to disrupt the target's balance, but Maki used it as

a catapult to send Koutarou flying. Koutarou went from a sliding posture to being above the demon in an instant. Thanks to that, the demon's claws missed him.

“Gugugu, yu fel fo it!”

However, the demon had already predicted that Koutarou would dodge. It ignored Koutarou and continued towards Maki. It intended to kill Maki who was providing support from the rear.

“Yu wil die firs!!”

At that moment, Koutarou and Maki's thoughts, words and the attacking demon's roar all mixed with each other.

“Aika-san,—”

“Quick Cast – Force Field!”

“—some footing! And—”

A defensive spell appeared in front of Koutarou. He kicked at it and changed his direction in the air.

“It's okay! I—”

“Dieeeeeeee!!”

However, the demon was already right next to Maki, and Koutarou would never be able to make it in time from his position. The demon smiled as it was about to enjoy the coming slaughter and slashed it claws towards Maki.

“—use that!”

“—already am!”

Koutarou appeared between Maki and the demon.

“Vadraa!?”

The demon quickly changed its target and slashed its claws towards Koutarou. The blow from those powerful arms roared as they came flying towards Koutarou.

“What!?”

However, as the claws slashed at Koutarou, they passed right through him. It was almost as if he was a mirage.

“Well done, No.2!”

Maki used the opportunity to distance herself from the demon. At the same time, the Koutarou who was in front of the demon vanished. It was the slightly slimmer, handsome Koutarou illusion that Maki had created. If this hadn't been in the middle of a battle, the demon might have seen through it. However, at the timing it had appeared, that was a very difficult thing to do. The demon had been fooled and Maki took some distance away from it.

“Damit!”

Not giving up, the demon crushed the snow below its feet and chased after Maki. However, Maki chanted a new spell to keep it from doing so.

“Quick Cast – Fire Wall!”

“Yu fol!”

A wall of flame appeared in front of the demon and blocked it from continuing forward. But the demon covered its body in a thick layer of ice and charged through. The flames that Maki had

created didn't have the power to burn the demon through the ice. As a result, the ice alone melted and the demon made it through the wall of flame almost unharmed.

“Guhahaha! Tis tim yu wil die!!”

The demon was convinced that Maki was going to die. There was no way that her small body would be able to withstand a powerful blow from the demon, and Koutarou was on the other side of the wall of flame. As a result, Maki had ended up blocking off her backup. With the illusion gone, there was nothing to stand in the demon's way. Maki's death was now unavoidable.

“Guaaa!?”

However-

“…Even though the temperature was low, and you've cast defensive spells, would you normally make your ally cross through fire? And what's more you even used yourself as bait…”

“Fufufu, like I told you. I love the Satomi-kun who still does it anyway.”

Before the demon's claws could reach Maki, Koutarou's sword pierced the demon's back.

Everything had been part of Maki and Koutarou's trap.

She had reduced the temperature of her wall of flame and let the demon pass through. The demon would then think that Maki had cut off her backup, forget about Koutarou and focus just on her.

However, the wall of flame's temperature was low and Koutarou was being protected by Flame Protection and Elemental Shield. He easily broke through the wall and scored a direct hit on the demon's wide open back.

If the demon had jumped over the wall of flames and attacked from above, Maki would have been in danger. The reason Koutarou's sword had been covered in flames was to keep the demon cautious of traps from above.

Without using a single advanced spell. Koutarou and Maki's perfect teamwork had created an inescapable trap.

“I-Imposible, ho ar yu aliv!? I kiled you! I shold hav kiled yu!!”

Having had Signaltin thrust into its body, the demon's magic was rejected and its body turned into dust.

“Curse yu Vadra! Vadraaa! Vadraaaaaaaa!!”

Even though the sword had gotten weaker, the demon couldn't endure having the sword thrust into the center of its body, and in just a few seconds, the demon's body turned to dust. Like the demon, the dust was pure white. The strong mountain wind swiftly scattered the dust.

What's Inside the Pocket

Part 1

Thursday, February 4

The next day, Maki was contacting her allies in Darkness Rainbow from her room in the hotel. Her other classmates that shared the room with her had all left to go ski, so she was all alone. She wasn't using her small magical tool to talk with one person, but the magical tools used to talk to multiple people at the same time.

“It was certainly a strong demon, but it was horribly frightened from the start and there was no way to make a contract with it. When I talked to it, it attacked me and I had to put it down.”

“Hmm, it's rare to see you resolve things with force, Maki.”

“If there's no way to talk, it would have to be resolved by force.”

“That is true.”

Maki was reporting about the white demon while keeping a lot of information hidden. The only thing she reported was that the demon was scared and that she had ended up killing it.

“Navy, why was the demon so afraid?”

“I never found out. The only clue was that the demon kept repeating the term 'Vadra.’”

In the end, Maki never understood what had caused the demon to be so scared. Since she was unable to properly talk to the demon, her only clues came from the demon talking to itself. What she had found out was that Vadra was a noun.

“I see… Vadra, huh… I haven't heard of that word before.”

The girl in purple shook her head. She was the most knowledgeable in Darkness Rainbow, but not even she had heard the word before.

“Well, in the end it was just a lone demon. I think it's better if we switch to talking about Rainbow instead.”

Seemingly bored, the girl in red tried to end the discussion regarding the demon. To her, fighting was all that mattered; talking about something that had already been killed was meaningless.

“You have a point.”

Maki agreed, she wanted the discussion to shift away from the demon as well since there were a lot of things she wanted to keep hidden. Because the other girls were quiet, Maki changed the topic.

“About the magic power of room 106. The reason for the increase was because Yurika and Satomi Koutarou got their hands on some artifacts.”

“Artifacts?”

The girl in red was surprised, and Maki nodded to her.

“Yes. Yurika has obtained a new cane and Satomi Koutarou's sword has been strengthened.”

“Navy-chan, how is Yurika-chan's new cane? Was it cute?”

Hearing about a new cane, the girl in orange was the first to react. She had the same reaction as when Maki got her cane.

“It had a design that wouldn't live up to your hopes.”

“Eeeeeeh!? Another serious and old-fashioned one!?”

What's Inside the Pocket

“Navy, what is that cane's ability?”

“It's a rather strange ability. Because of that it doesn't pose much of a threat on its own.”

Maki began explaining Yurika's new cane.

“Yurika's cane has been created so even someone who isn't a magician can use it. Because of that, the cane handled almost all of the execution. It also has a large variety of spells stored inside it.”

“That sounds pretty special.”

“Yes. Because of that though, the power of each spell is weak.”

“Navy-chan, does that mean that even a complete amateur can become an average magician?”

“Yes. So even if we use that cane, it won't have much of an effect. It's not like we would get twice as strong.”

“Then what’s the point? It's not like we fight 1v1.”

“We don't. That's why I'm not worried.”

Maki smiled at the girl in orange. If Yurika's new cane had been limited to a few spells, their strategy would have to be reconsidered. Since the overall magic power of the cane was large, if that magic power had been focused into a few spells, each of them would be powerful. However, since that wasn't the case, Maki was able to casually chat about it.

“So Maki, what about Satomi Koutarou? His weapon increased in power, didn't it?”

“Yes. Its abilities are the same as before, but its performance has greatly increased. It's completely different from before. I don't think I could beat him on my own.”

What Maki had seen before was energy given the shape of a sword. What she saw this time seemed to have the same abilities, but the power was on a different dimension.

“You don't sound very worried though.”

The girl in red noticed that Maki's tone of voice didn't sound very worried. And Maki honestly admitted that.

“That's true. I don't think it's necessary to regard Satomi Koutarou as dangerous.”

“What do you mean, Navy?”

Not only the girl in red, but the girl in purple also questioned Maki.

“I understood this after my contact with him this time but… it seems like Yurika and Satomi Koutarou aren't necessarily in a cooperative relationship.”

“Navy-chan, by not in a cooperative relationship, do you mean they're not allies?”

“Yes.”

Maki nodded and looked at all of the six girls.

“Last time their goal just happened to overlap, but in reality, Yurika hasn't revealed her identity to Satomi Koutarou yet. Since Rainbow Heart forbids the private use of magic, they might not be able to reach a cooperative relationship.”

“Which means, Navy-”

The girl in purple realized what Maki wanted to say and looked at her.

“That's right, Purple.”

Maki nodded.

What's Inside the Pocket

“We might be able to avoid having to fight Satomi Koutarou.”

As Darkness Navy, she would be able to avoid fighting a powerful enemy. And as Aika Maki, she wouldn't have to fight Satomi Koutarou. Maki was happy that her two standpoints overlapped on this point. However, the girl in red looked at Maki and showed a malicious smile.

“Hmm, last time you were going on about how you were going to kill him, but now you've so easily given up, why is that?”

In her report the other day, Maki had repeatedly said that she would kill Koutarou. However, now she had easily given up on fighting him. The girl in red was curious about the reason why, but she also wanted to tease Maki.

Not good…

But that was the topic that Maki didn't want to discuss. Not even she was certain of the reason why. It wasn't for the simple reason of her life being saved. It was just that some vague part of her heart had already accepted Koutarou. That was something too hard to explain to others, and a topic she didn't want others to discuss.

“I don't live to fight like you.”

So there, Maki carefully chose her words and spoke of Dark Navy's reasons. She also took care not to mix in Aika Maki's reasons in that.

“If I don't have to fight against an opponent I know I'd lose to, there's no harm in not doing so. I don't believe that fighting is worth it even if I know I'd lose.”

“That's harsh.”

Having suffered a counter attack, the girl in red smiled wryly.

“But that does sound more like Maki. Going on about killing was unlike you.”

She didn't think that Maki's feelings for Koutarou had changed, so she didn't pursue the topic any further. She believed that Maki still despised Koutarou, but wanted to avoid a fight.

Like me, huh…

Just who was her true self? Was it Dark Navy together with her allies, or Aika Maki together with Koutarou? Maki felt anxious about that as she listened to the girl in red's words.

“Navy, what are the chances of making him one of our allies?”

Maki was about to enter some deep thoughts when the girl in purple pulled her back into reality. Maki shoved her thoughts away and directed her attention towards the girl in purple.

“Let's see…”

She began thinking about Koutarou. He was straight forward, clumsy and stubborn. He would very rarely lie, but he never betrayed someone else's trust. He was the only person to remove the burden on Maki's heart and set her free.

As she put together her thoughts, Maki was careful not showing a smile on her face.

“I don't think there's much of a chance to make him a member.”

Based on Koutarou's personality, Maki couldn't imagine that he would agree with Darkness Rainbow's motives. If anything, he would be on Rainbow Heart's side.

More importantly, she wanted to keep Koutarou away from the fight between Darkness Rainbow and Rainbow Heart. She wanted him to remain as Aika Maki's friend, rather than Darkness Navy's ally.

“But, he's not the type who would cut his ties with his allies. Even if we can't completely make him an ally, we should be able to gain an advantage based on our effort.”

After thinking for a while, the words that left Maki's mouth ended up belonging to Dark Navy. They didn't coincide with Maki's desire, but it was the truth and she believed that expressing it that way would be the best way to convince her allies.

As long as I can keep Koutarou away from the room during the fight, he should be safe…

That was Maki's main goal.

“As expected of Maki. Your thoughts are deep and vicious.”

“Petty tricks like that don't suit me, so you do it, Maki.”

“Navy, can we leave that work to you?”

Fortunately, Darkness Navy had no suspicions about Maki's report, and all six of them agreed with her.

“Yes. I managed to gain some of Satomi Koutarou’s trust during this case, so I believe it would be best if I did this.”

“Then please do, Navy.”

“I'll do it in parallel with my information gathering.”

“Navy, do you have anything else to report?”

“I don't. This is all for now.”

“Then this meeting is now over. Navy, please report any changes in development.”

“I understand.”

And like so, Maki's report ended. As a result, fighting against Koutarou would be avoided whenever possible, and Maki would be in charge of making that happen. Since she wanted to avoid fighting Koutarou, this was just what she wished for.

“See you later, Navy-chan.”

“Until next time.”

The 3D images of the girls surrounding Maki vanished one after another.

“Oh right. Maki, you were on a skiing trip, weren't you?”

“Yes.”

“Then that's good. How about you let loose a little.”

“That's none of your business.”

“You know, you're just wasting your life.”

The girl in red persevered, but in the end, even she vanished and Maki was left alone in the hotel room.

“…Good, I don't have to fight with Satomi-kun…”

As she was left alone, the serious expression melted away from Maki's face. It was like she was a completely different person from when she was speaking as Dark Navy. However, Maki wasn't aware of that. Maki still believed herself to be the cold, evil magical girl, Dark Navy even now.

“Alright then, let’s go meet with Satomi-kun right away. I have some work to do after all♪”

But as Maki flung open the door and left, she looked more like a magical girl bringing love and happiness.

What's Inside the Pocket

Part 2

When Yurika woke up, she was lying on a bed in the hotel. The last thing she could remember before waking up here was her being attacked by the white demon in the mountain.

“Aika-san, Aika-san, rock-paper-scissors.”

“Eeeeh!? Satomi-kun, you want me to go buy!? Matsudaira-kun is—”

“I'm not a weakling like Mackenzie who always goes easy on women.”

“Geez, it's because you're like that that you never get any chocolate.”

“Shut up. Here we go. Rock, paper, scissors—”

“—shoot.”

“Rock, paper, scissors, shoot.”

However, what surprised her more than that was the carefree sight on the sofa in front of her. Koutarou and Maki playing rock paper scissors seemed absurd to Yurika.

“Aaagh!! I lost!!”

“So you really did use scissors. I felt like you would do that when we got a draw.”

“W-What are you two doing?”

Koutarou threw scissors while Maki threw rock.

Having lost, Koutarou was holding his head and was mortified, while Maki, who won, smiled. That sight made Yurika's eyes open wide in surprise.

M-Maybe I've been cursed to make it look like rock-paper-scissors…?

Yurika knew that Maki was planning on killing Koutarou. So she felt like there was a danger behind the smile she was showing Koutarou. And for the same reason, she felt it was dangerous that Maki was in her room.

“Oh, Yurika, you woke up?”

“S-Satomi-san, just what happened?”

Yurika looked back and forth between Koutarou and Maki and asked for the reason why the two were together.

“Hm? After you were done in, I had Aika-san help me beat that strange monster, and after that I carried you back home.”

Yurika had planned on confronting Maki after putting Koutarou to sleep. However, since she ended up being frozen, the showdown with Maki never happened. As a result, it ended with Koutarou saving a stranded classmate before it became a problem.

But that wasn't what Yurika wanted to know.

“T-That's not what I meant. Why are Satomi-san and Maki-chan so… so friendly to each other!?”

“Why? Well, that's because we're classmates.”

Koutarou stared at Yurika. To him, Maki was a classmate. He hadn't had much to do with her up until now, but it's not like he hated her. And this time she had helped him a lot. He was just treating Maki like normal, so when questioned why, he couldn't understand the question.

“Uhm, that's not it, Maki-chan is, you know, Satomi-san's…!?”

What's Inside the Pocket

Yurika wanted to convey this situation to Koutarou somehow. Maki was an evil magical girl and she had been enemies with Yurika for a while now. And that Maki was aiming to kill Koutarou. Yurika wanted to convey that to Koutarou, but she couldn't come up with the words that would convince him. But before she could, Maki opened her mouth.

“Fufufu, Satomi-kun, since Yurika-san had just woken up, how about you give her some time to get her feelings and clothes in order?”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

Koutarou nodded at Maki's words. He believed it was just as she said.

There was no way she wouldn't be confused after being frozen solid. She needed some time to calm down, and Yurika was a girl, she should be given some time to fix her outfit.

“Maki-chan…?”

However, that perplexed Yurika. She couldn't help but be anxious over what Maki was trying to do.

“Also, you're going to buy for my sake aren't you?”

“It's not for your sake, Aika-san. Hey Yurika, you haven't eaten anything since yesterday, so you're hungry, right? I'll buy you something, what do you want?”

“Ah, u-uhm…”

“I want something to drink.”

“I won't buy anything for you, Aika-san.”

“Eeeeeeeh!?”

And while Yurika was perplexed, the two continued their intimate conversation.

J-Just what happened…?

Koutarou and Maki's conversation seemed to go past the lines of just friends. Their relationship might have been similar to Koutarou's and Yurika's.

“What is it, Yurika?”

“Ah, eh…?”

“What do you want to eat?”

“Ah, r-right! If there's some bread or something, that'll be fine!”

“I got it, I'll be right back.”

Koutarou got up from the sofa and walked towards the room's entrance without noticing Yurika's confusion.

“Satomi-kun, make sure you don't get lost.”

“As if I would! Idiot!”

“S-Satomi-san!?”

Yurika helplessly called out Koutarou's name. However, Koutarou left the room without turning around, leaving only Yurika and Maki in the room.

After Koutarou left, the room turned silent. There were a lot of things that Yurika wanted to ask Maki, but the situation of being alone with Maki in a room was too eerie, and she had trouble opening her mouth.

However, as time passed, the sight of Maki smiling on the sofa became frightening and Yurika couldn't stay quiet any more. So she finally spoke up and asked what was on her mind. By speaking she was able to divert her fear.

“U-Uhm, Maki-chan.”

“Hm?”

Having been called out, Maki casually raised her head. And without ruining her smile, she stared right at Yurika. Despite being slightly pressured, Yurika did her best to continue talking.

“Just what are you planning?”

“What do you mean?”

“I'm talking about Satomi-san! What are you planning on doing to Satomi-san!?”

Yurika's most pressing question was the reason behind Maki being so close to Koutarou.

Yurika knew that Maki considered Koutarou an enemy, so she definitely had an ulterior motive for getting closer to him.

Since Maki understood that as well, she honestly answered without sneering or making fun of Yurika.

“There's no need to be so scared, Yurika. I'm friendly with Satomi-kun because I don't want to do anything.”

“Don't want to do anything!? W-Wha, what's that supposed to mean!?”

Yurika was confused.

She didn't understand the meaning of Maki's words. Getting friendly because she didn't want to do anything; she had a hard time taking that at face value, knowing that Maki considered Koutarou an enemy.

But what confused Yurika even more was the atmosphere around Maki. It wasn't the same pressuring, sharp atmosphere from before; instead it was quiet and stable. Yurika couldn't even sense any hostility towards herself.

What is this? She's not scary, but… I don't feel like I can win…

Yurika could feel that Maki's hostility had been greatly reduced. However, in return, she didn't think she could win if they ended up fighting again. She believed she had a higher chance of winning against Maki from yesterday than today.

Maki-chan has gotten much stronger… Just what happened between yesterday and today…?

It wasn't like Maki's magic power had increased or that she had gained new abilities. Instead, her mental stability was drawing out all of Maki's strength. And that let Yurika feel an overwhelming difference in ability.

“That's true, Yurika. This is probably hard for you to understand after everything's that's happened… but we, Darkness Rainbow, have decided to avoid a direct confrontation with Satomi-kun.”

“You won't fight Satomi-san!?”

Yurika was surprised once more.

“Wait, Maki-chan, what does that mean!?”

“Calm down. Since this concerns you too, I'll properly explain.”

What's Inside the Pocket

Yurika was panicking while Maki remained calm. Indeed, if the two were to fight now, Maki would probably win easily.

“I figured this out while talking to Satomi-kun yesterday and today, but… Yurika, you still haven't truly revealed your identity to him, have you?”

“Y-Yes… that's sort of what happened…”

At first she wanted him to believe her. However, lately Yurika had come to feel like they were fine this way, and she let Koutarou's misunderstanding as it was.

“That's why you're not in a proper cooperative relationship. Isn't that right?”

“…Eh!?”

That left Yurika aghast. In her mind, Koutarou was already her ally. However, Maki's words made her aware that it might not be the case.

“T-That's, true, but…”

“That's why. Darkness Rainbow isn't strictly Satomi-kun's enemy yet. So there's no need for us to increase our enemies. Isn't that right?”

“Ah…”

That was when Yurika realized what Maki and Darkness Rainbow were thinking.

Since Maki believed that Koutarou and Yurika were allies, they recognized Koutarou as an enemy. Since that wasn't truly the case, there was no point in attacking him. Instead, she began to feel the other way about him.

“S-So you're befriending Satomi-kun!?”

“That's right, Yurika. Since Satomi-kun is strong, I'd rather not fight him.”

Maki quietly nodded at Yurika.

“And if possible I want to make him an ally. Even if that fails, because of the way Satomi-kun is, as long as we get closer he won't be able to get serious in a fight. So I want to befriend him by any means possible.”

“Maki-chan!”

She would use Koutarou's good will for the sake of the fight. That was something that Yurika couldn't forgive. Because of that, strength returned to Yurika's eyes.

“But Yurika, this situation is useful for you too.”

“Eh?”

“As you know, Satomi-kun is a gentle person. He might fight, but he won't fight to the death.”

Maki continued speaking with a thin smile. A strong sense of trust for Koutarou could be sensed from that smile. That puzzled Yurika, as that wasn't the smile of someone planning on using Koutarou's good will.

“Darkness Rainbow's intentions are just what I said. But, based on how you and I act, we might be able to keep Satomi-kun out of our fight.”

“T-That's…”

That was certainly something that Yurika wanted. She wished that Koutarou would think of her as just a classmate. And she wanted to graduate alongside him as just a classmate. In order to do that, it was important to not involve Koutarou in her fight. So using this situation to distance Koutarou from any fighting was indeed something useful for Yurika.

What's Inside the Pocket

Maki-chan just said 'Darkness Rainbow's intentions'…

There was also one more thing that caught Yurika's interest. The way Maki phrased 'Darkness Rainbow's intentions' made it sound like she personally had different intentions. In that case, what were they?

“…What's the reason for you to personally not want to involve Satomi-san, Maki-chan?”

“Yurika…”

Yurika honestly questioned Maki, and after recovering from her surprise she smiled. And while smiling, she looked towards the door that Koutarou had left through.

“Yesterday, after you got frozen… I was attacked by that demon and almost died.”

While staring at the door, Maki touched her side with her hand. Just yesterday night, there was a large wound there, large enough to threaten her life.

“And Satomi-kun saved me. I want to return that favor.”

However, now there was no wound carved there anymore. Koutarou had healed her using Signaltin's powers. Instead, a lot of things had been carved into Maki's heart, and they urged Maki to return the favor.

“Satomi-san saved Maki-chan… and that's why…”

Up until now, Maki had taken a lot of incomprehensible actions, but after hearing the reason behind them, it was enough to convince Yurika.

Darkness Rainbow wanted to avoid a fight with Koutarou. There were many methods of doing that, and amongst those, Maki had chosen the safest one for Koutarou in an attempt to repay the favor.

“So let's work together, Yurika. You and I have to keep that person away from the fight!”

“M-Maki-chan!?”

However, despite understanding all of those circumstances, Maki asking Yurika for her cooperation was just so surprising.

Part 3

Koutarou returned shortly after Yurika and Maki's discussion. Because of that, Yurika still hadn't recovered from the shock and was sitting on the bed with a spaced out look on her face.

“I'm back, Yurika. I got you some bread. They had your favorite yakisoba bread, so I got you that.”

“Welcome back, Satomi-kun. What bread did you get for me?”

Because of that, Maki was the only one to welcome him back. She got up from the sofa and approached Koutarou.

“There's none for you. Why would I have to do that much?”

“My, well if you start earning points now, I'll let you become my boyfriend eventually.”

“I don't want a girl you can get with bread.”

“Geez, you're not being honest.”

Koutarou and Maki joked around. But to Yurika who watched over the two, their relationship didn't seem like something that developed over a single day. It was as if Koutarou was acting as he was with his childhood friend, Kenji.

Maki-chan said that Satomi-san saved her life, but… is that really all…?

Koutarou and Maki's relationship seemed different from savior and saved to Yurika. Something more dramatic than saving Maki's life must have had happened. That was what Yurika was thinking, but the more she thought of it, the more unlikely it seemed. Yurika just got more and more confused.

“Well, you helped me out a lot yesterday, so I can at least buy you a drink.”

“Really?”

“Consider it a bribe to keep you quiet.”

“Ahaha, understood. So what is there?”

“Let's see, an unhealthy cola, an unhealthy cola made by another company and overly sweet strawberry milk for Yurika.”

“A cola then. I love cola.”

“What a coincidence, actually I do too.”

Koutarou pulled out two black bottles from the plastic bag and then put the rest on Yurika's lap. What was left in the bag was the strawberry milk and the yakisoba bread.

“Here, drink this.”

“I prefer the other one.”

“Don't be so picky.”

“Since it's a bribe, I think it's okay to be picky.”

“…Fine…”

Koutarou reluctantly handed his favorite cola over to Maki. She accepted the drink with both hands and smiled.

“That side of you is worth a lot of points you know?”

“Hurry up and drink it before I take it back.”

What's Inside the Pocket

“You know you won't, geez~~”

While Yurika watched over the two, they began drinking their cola while chatting. They constantly smiled and were close to spouting out their cola from time to time.

They somehow… get along really well…

Yurika felt like the atmosphere surrounding Koutarou and Maki was special.

“Right, then.”

“Where's your manners?”

“Thank you for the drink, Satomi-kun.”

After finishing her cola, Maki got up from the sofa. She then put her hands together and smiled at Koutarou.

“Satomi-kun, do you want to go skiing together after this?”

“Yeah, let's do that. Yurika, you're coming too, right?”

“Ah, uhm…”

“Alright, then it's decided. I'll go get ready!”

Before Yurika could give a clear answer, Maki was already walking towards the door, as if she wasn't going to take a no for an answer.

“Let's meet up in the lobby after getting changed.”

“Yeah… Yurika, don't space out, hurry up and eat or we'll leave you behind.”

“O-Okay! I will, I will!”

Yurika was still doubtful, but even though she had to move her body, she had no choice but to go ski.

“Fufu.”

Maki left the room with a short laugh and after entering the hallway and closing the door, she stopped for a moment.

“Phew…”

Maki let out a sigh of relief. Her and Koutarou was one thing, but she still felt a little nervous being around her enemy, Yurika.

Oh right…

As she sighed, she remembered what was in her pocket.

“…Maybe I should… use it…?”

Maki mumbled to herself in a quiet voice and put her hand in her skirt's pocket. She touched something small and hard with her fingertips. But Maki was still hesitant and couldn't pull it out. Her expression changed into an anxious one.

“But, won't it… be like tricking him…?”

Maki began grasping what was in her pocket; however, she still wasn't pulling her hand out. At the same time, she couldn't let go either. Maki was still hesitating, but—

“No, I'm sure it's fine… he's not the kind of person who would be moved by something cheap like this…”

Maki mustered her courage and pulled her hand out of her pocket.

What's Inside the Pocket

“Then… then it'd be fine if I make myself… look a little cuter, won't it…?”

She slowly opened her hand. Her heart started beating faster, she was starting to blank out and her hand was slightly trembling.

“If he would get happy over something like this…”

On top of her hand was something she always hated.

“N-No! That's not it, this is for Darkness Rainbow's sake!! That's right!! If it's for everyone's sake, I can do my best, even with things I don't like!!” It was the liquid lipstick that she had been given and supposedly thrown away right thereafter.

Afterword

Long time no see, everyone. It's the author, Takehaya.

This volume was published in three months just like the one before. The reason for that is so that we would get back to the main characters as fast as possible.

This volume takes place a few days after Volume 7. Using Volume 7 as a starting point, the characters have now begun moving to fulfill their own wishes, which will lead into the next story. In this volume, we see the return of Maki and her confrontation with a powered up(?) Yurika acting like a magical girl again. And the environment surrounding Yurika greatly changes.

The next volume will be 8.5 just like I wrote in the afterword 7.5. It will correspond to the second manuscript that Theia wrote. The travelling party reached their destination, the Pardomshiha territory. There, they reform the Forthorthe regular army, and wage war on Maxfern's coup d'etat army. I only need to write that story, but I'm racking my brain, worrying how I am going to fit it all in one volume.

Speaking of worries, I have worries regarding my schedule as well. I want to put out the next volume where most of the main characters will be missing as fast as possible, but my schedule has been thrown for a loop because of the earthquake.[3] Based on the rolling blackouts, I might be able to return to my normal pace, but this is all up to luck.

This volume featured a more close up look on magic, but magic actually uses a much more complex power than we think.

In a lot of works, a magician will create fireballs, shoot lightning, use magnetism or crush with gravity. However, if magic like this really existed, it would serve as proof that the Grand Unified Theory is real.

The Grand Unified Theory is the ultimate theory that Einstein attempted to form. It would unify all the fundamental forces, such as electricity, magnetism and gravity. By the way, electricity and magnetism have already been unified. There are four well known principles that prove the relation between them. However, principles regarding the other fundamental forces, especially gravity, are still a mystery. Even the closest theory to explaining gravity, the String Theory, has five different variants, and we are far away from solving it.

But please remember, many magicians create fireballs, shoot electricity, use magnetism and crush with gravity. They convert the energy known as magic into all kinds of forces. In other words, these magicians are casually using what scientists are dying to know.

Which means that there is a high chance that magicians are creatures that can recognize the higher dimensions that String Theory is advocating, since they are able to sense the magic power covering space.

So since that was causing some troubles for me, I decided to ignore reality to some degree. I want the world to be a place where one can learn magic if they train, it wouldn't be fun otherwise.

It's like not thinking too deep into the giant robots in anime, or detectives running into far too many mysteries. Since it's the basis for the story, let's not be too harsh.

Reality is unexpectedly boring (lol).

Anyways, on to recent news.

Recently, I felt like it would be bad to shut myself in at home to work all the time, so I've started biking. Since the movie theater is about 30 minutes away by bike, I've taken to watching a movie

[3] The author is referring to the Tōhoku earthquake that struck Japan in 2011

whenever I get some time off. As a result, I've been able to sleep better and gain an appreciation for exercise.

Back in high school, it took me 40 minutes to get to school with the bike. Because of that, the wear and tear on the tires was huge and I could see the casing from time to time. I don't bike as much as I do then, but I will try to continue exercising regularly.

And the other day, I wrote an autograph for the first time. They just came up and asked if I was Takehaya. He worked at a bookstore and mentioned holding a fair. But since I had written a bunch of drafts, I stained the colored paper surface and the characters ended up blurring. I couldn't help but feel that I shouldn't do something I'm unused to. While I was thinking that, a different bookstore said something about renovating and asked if I could sign 30 copies, and I suddenly ended up practicing my signature. I'll be writing them now, but I hope I can do it well. Yurika Fight! Yurika Fight!

I've been told I can write a dozen or so pages of afterword, but since I can't write that much, I think I'm going to wrap this up.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone at the editorial department, Poco-san who's always on time with the illustrations, my party of friends who always join me for a drink when I'm tired, and to all the readers who bought this book.

Let us meet again in the afterword of Volume 8.5

June, 2011 Takehaya

Corona Convention
NEW!
2010/2/5
Article 12
Only Nijino Yurika (Resident of room 106) is allowed to use magic in room 106.
Article 12 Postscript
In addition, in the case that this article is broken, Nijino Yurika's (Resident of room 106) responsibility of the magic cane will be questioned.